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Tales and Traditions,

ECCLESIASTICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS.

BEING A SECOND SERIES OF

"Historical Tales and Legends."



LONDON:
BURNS AND LAMBERT, 17 PORTMAN STREET,
PORTMAN SQUARE.

1858.

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XI.

THE LOSS OF THE "CONCEPTION."

IN the sixteenth century Portugal was a great naval power. Her flag was to be seen flying in every port in the world, and her colonies and possessions were very numerous and extensive. She had a flourishing settlement in India, upon the Malabar coast, the affairs of which were administered by a governor, who bore the title of Viceroy, and whose seat of government was at Goa. From this point missionaries proceeded into the interior, to spread, amid the swamps and jungles and sands of that vast country, the holy religion of Jesus.

At that period the art of navigation was very imperfectly known; and not the least perilous portion of a missionary's enterprise was the voyage he must undertake before he could reach the scene of his labours. The records of the age are full of heroic actions performed by priests on their way to distant lands: of endurance under famine; of devotion during pestilence; of courage in shipwreck; of patience amid the thousand disasters with which their ocean course was beset. But few narratives of this class are more touching than the accounts we have received of the loss of the Portuguese ship "Conception" in the year 1555, on board of which three

Fathers of the Indian Mission had taken their passage. It is the duration of suffering, far more than its intensity, that tries the heart and courage of a man; and it is far more affecting, if it be less thrilling, to hear of calm and generous fortitude under lingering torture from starvation, thirst, heat, and disease, than of unshrinking boldness in the most terrible shipwreck that ever cost the lives of a crew.

On the 22d of August, 1555, the "Conception," Captain Noluc, bound from Lisbon to Cochin, a port on the coast of Malabar, ran aground, at three o'clock in the morning, on a sand-bank 400 leagues distant from the Indian continent. The shock roused all on board from their deep sleep: there was a rough, grating sound; then a sudden stoppage of the vessel, and a momentary lull, during which every man looked at his neighbour with terror in his eyes. The next instant, raised on the heaving bosom of a rolling billow, she seemed to be again afloat, but only to drop heavily upon the bottom with a shock that made every timber in her sides creek and every heart quake. With a loud cry, captain, sailors, soldiers, and passengers rushed upon deck, and at once perceived the awful truth. The good ship was fast aground; the sea was breaking over her side with fearful violence; the yards and sails had swung round with the wind; and the masts groaned in their sockets, as if every moment would see them snap in sunder. The night was cloudy and dark; the wind roared through the cordage; no one knew where they were. Every thing conspired to increase the general consternation; and in the first moment of panic some of the crew would have leaped overboard, some would have forced open the wine-casks, some would have fallen on the wretched pilot whose carelessness had been the cause of their ruin, when the voices of the three priests were heard above the din, giving encouragement where it was needed, restraining the frenzy of those who had lost *their presence* of mind, and urging all to trust to their *skill and energy* for the preservation of their lives.

With what eagerness all eyes were bent upon the sky, across which a few streaks of light now announced the dawn of day! with what anxiety they waited to see whether they had struck on any island or coast which might afford them food and shelter, if they should have the happiness to reach it! Meanwhile every wave seemed to take effect on the stranded vessel. Her bottom had given way in several places; for she was fast filling with water, and the pumps were worked in vain. "Will the day never dawn?" said many an impatient heart. "Will she hold together till morning?" was the question anxiously debated by all. At length the sun rose, and then—oh, woful sight!—as far as the eye could reach there was no land to be seen; nothing but foaming waves met the view on every side. There was no refuge from the wreck beyond the little patch of sand, scarcely twice as large as the ship's deck, on which she had struck. For a little while there was silence in the ship, as each eye scanned the horizon, and then arose a wild cry of anguish from four hundred men, whose only hope had been blasted, and who now saw no escape from a horrible death.

Then arose Father André Gonsalves, who was the oldest of the three priests, and said, in a loud, commanding voice, which in a moment stilled the hearts of all, and seemed to still the very waves:

"Be ye men or children, that ye should thus give way? or be ye Christians or heathens, that ye should thus distrust your God? What is the sea, that it should rage but at His command? See, now, and do as I shall counsel you. Divide yourselves into two companies; and while the one half throw out anchors and cables from the stern, and heave with the capstan, let the other half hew down the masts and lighten the ship of her cargo. It may be ye may bring her off the sand, and so save your lives; and if not, if ye cannot float the ship, we are still in the hands of God; then leave the vessel, and take refuge on the sand. There are provisions in the ship for your sustenance, and it

may be God will send us a vessel to deliver us out of our strait."

When the priest had done speaking, there was a murmur of consent throughout the ship, and the captain said:

"What the priest counsels, that will we do. And see that ye lose no time, for I perceive the storm arising; and if it find us stranded here, the ship will be broken, and we shall be lost."

Then the sailors, as men in whose breasts the hope of life had revived, set themselves manfully to their work. Some dragged the heavy anchors from the prow, and threw them over the stern; some, with strong levers, worked the capstan; some, with axes and hammers, hewed down the masts; some pushed up the boards of the deck; some threw the cargo into the sea; all day they toiled; and men who had never worked before, worked then side by side with the common sailors. But in vain. The sun was fast sinking into the western wave when they desisted from their labour; the ship was as firm as ever. She had made a deep bed for herself in the soft sand; her seams had opened, her hold was full of water, and no human power could float her again.

As soon as the captain saw that there was no hope of saving the vessel, he pointed again to the gathering clouds and the rising wind, and said, "Ye must make haste, if ye would not sleep this night in the sea."

The ship also warned them to leave her at once; for as the water rose in her hold and the waves broke over her, she threatened every moment to fall to pieces. Then, with heavy hearts, the weary crew, each with some provision for the night, landed upon the narrow slip of sand; and the three priests comforted them with holy thoughts, and bid them trust in God.

But the captain had already determined what he would do; for he had consulted the missionaries, and *their advice was*, that he, and as many as could go,

should leave the island in the long-boat, and endeavour to make the coast of India, where they might obtain succour, and then return for the rest. "I will go," said the captain, "if you will go with me."

"Nay," said Father André, "I will stay with those that are left behind."

"We will stay also," said the other religious.

The captain embraced the three fathers, and said, "I too would stay; but who then could navigate the vessel?"

"No," said they, "you must go, and the two mates, and ten of the best sailors, and as many more as the boat will hold; and if God bless the voyage, you will return for us." And so it was agreed.

Before leaving the ship that night, the captain conveyed into the long-boat a sufficient quantity of provisions for the voyage, and anchored it safely apart from the wreck, leaving ten sailors, whom he had selected to guard it. The night was a night of dread; for one of those storms which are only known in tropical latitudes broke upon the shipwrecked mariners; and when the morning dawned they dreaded to see the cutter torn from her moorings, and the wreck, with all their provisions, swept away. But God had mercy upon them; the return of light showed them the wreck still in its place, though broken in two; and the cutter had drifted indeed to sea-ward, but was still rocking safely on the billows. The storm had subsided, and they were able to reach the ruins of the "Conception," which it was plain could not hold together much longer. They found many of the barrels and casks stove in; but they were able to save thirty sacks of biscuit, ten barrels of water, a few jars of sweetmeats, eight large cheeses, and seven pipes of wine. These were all safely brought on shore, and then, at the captain's request, Father André addressed the people as follows:

"Ye are here 400 men; and ye see the provisions that ye have for weeks, it may be for months, that ye may be left unfound by any ship. Will ye be content

to perish of starvation, when there is a way open for you to be saved?"

"Show us, father, how we may be saved, and we will obey thee."

"My counsel is this: let the captain take with him the ten best sailors and forty of our number,—for more the vessel would not hold,—and let them man the cutter and sail for the Indian coast. If, by God's mercy, they reach the land, they will return hither in search of those who are left behind; and those who go shall all be chosen by lot."

When they heard this, all the people cried, "It is well!"

And the captain said, "What need is there for any further delay? let the lots be drawn, and we will sail."

Then the names were all written down by Father André, and a cask was brought, and a hat put into it, and in the hat were placed the papers with the names. Then the pilot was blindfolded, and he proceeded to draw one name at a time, and the people crowded round, breathless and pale, to watch the moment on which, to all appearance, depended life and death.

As each paper was drawn the captain read out the name, and the fortunate man ran down to the shore, and took his place in the cutter; and the others, looking after him with envy, hung with the most intense eagerness on the captain's lips as he read out the event. In that hour of trial the true character of each man's heart was seen. Some were nobly generous—the most part thought only of themselves. One, Lopez de Castro, heard his name called, and gave his privilege to his brother Alvaro, because he had a wife and children. But he was rewarded for his fraternal love; for Alvaro's own name was drawn afterwards, and thus Lopez was saved also.

Father André, in writing down the names, left out his own, but inserted those of his two brethren; hoping that one at least might be drawn, to give spiritual support and consolation to the crew of the cutter. When,

therefore, Father Pascal heard his name called, he was astonished, and said to Father André, "Did I not say I would not go?"

"Nevertheless be advised," said he; "I and Father Lopez are sufficient for those that are left; do thou accompany them that sail."

"Nay, but I know what I will do."

Now there was a poor lame boy, who had been saved with difficulty from the surf in landing. Father Lopez knew him well. He had a sick sister in Goa, and the poor lad was going over to see her before she died. As every name had issued from the cask he had listened with despairing looks, and still his own never came. Father Pascal had seen it, and his heart bled for the poor boy; and he said within himself, "What would I not give to deliver thee!"

There were now only two names more to be called. The first came out, it was not his. In breathless suspense the last was drawn—"Alfonso Pero."

"It is I! It is I!" screamed the lame boy.

"Thou!" cried a gigantic soldier, with a scowl; "*my* name is Alfonso Pero."

"What! are there two Alfonso Peros?" said the captain. "What is to be done now, father?"

"Done! why of course I am to go," shouted the soldier. "That crippled life is not worth saving."

"No, no, I am not worth saving," said the boy disconsolately; "but oh, my poor sister! my dear Isabel!"

There was a murmur among the crowd. All hated the rough soldier, and loved the helpless lad.

"We must cast lots between them which is to go," said Father André.

The lad's face brightened up, and the soldier stopped as he was going down to the cutter, with a savage oath. They drew. It was the soldier's name.

"We shall only meet the sooner in heaven," was all the lame boy said; and he sat down on the sand, and wept as if his heart was breaking.

Then Father Pascal went down and whispered

something in his ear. A gleam of joy shot over his countenance, and he fell senseless into the father's arms, who carried him down to the sea. In half an hour the cutter weighed anchor amid the cheers of those who went and those who stayed; and the sick Isabel's lame brother was on board.

With beating hearts the devoted party watched the sails of the little vessel, as with a fair wind it rapidly lessened in the distance, and at length was lost in the horizon. Then woe-begone and heart-sick they turned away, and sought comfort in each other's faces, where comfort there was none. The barren island seemed scarcely less inhospitable than the boiling ocean. Not a tree, not a blade of grass, not a herb to afford a scanty subsistence, not a spring of water to quench their thirst. As they wandered sullenly up and down, Father André again addressed them with words of comfort and advice. "Be of good courage," he said, "and take heart, and help yourselves. See, the ship is gone; save what ye can, and that which the waves wash up from time to time, put in safety, and do what ye can while ye can, for there are tokens of a gathering storm."

The calm resignation and practical wisdom of the holy man did much to assure the fainting spirits of the unhappy mariners. With ropes round their middles they waded into the sea, and catching hold of floating planks, drew them ashore. Others swam to the wreck, and clambering about from port to port of the now shattered hull, tied spars, and oars, and ropes together, to be hauled in by their companions on the sand. But they saved scarcely any of what they most required, that is, food. And as night came on, and the gale increased, they were compelled to desist. And here they passed another night of terror. The waves threatened to swallow up their little island; and each flash of lightning showed them the "Conception" gradually breaking up. When light returned, and with *it calm, nothing* was left where she had been, but a few

naked plankless ribs standing up against the morning sky. Their hearts failed them at the sight of this disaster; for on a farther search they had confidently reckoned on finding more food.

On the advice of the priest, they chose a captain or chieftain to preserve order and superintend their councils. They chose Don Alvaro de Alaide, a young nobleman only eighteen years of age; but an older man, of long experience, was appointed his coadjutor.

Father André then said, "See on all sides floating wood; the tide will wash it up. As it comes ashore, gather it, and ye shall make a boat. But first take yonder beam, and tie that smaller piece across the top, and set it up upon this rock. We will work beneath the shadow of the Holy Rood, and mariners who pass by in distant ships shall know that there are Christians upon this place. So shall the Cross save us."

And they did as the wise man had said, and Don Alvaro, with energy beyond his years, set each man to his work. Day by day broken pieces of the wreck were washed on shore, and carefully hauled up high upon the sand. And soon a large quantity was obtained, quite enough for the boat, which they now set about to construct. But they had very great difficulties to encounter. The ship's carpenter had sailed with the cutter, and they had no teacher but necessity. They were also very short of tools, of which only a small chisel, two cooper's adzes, and an axe, had been obtained from the wreck. However, they had no lack of nails, for every plank was studded with them; there was also a sufficiency of old iron; and their ingenuity devised means for the erection of a forge, in which fresh tools were constructed and the iron beaten into shape. The bellows were composed out of the top and bottom of a cask. The skin of a large fish, which was thrown ashore, as it seemed to them for the express purpose by the goodness of God, served for the leather sides. And when they were in want of a tube to form the nozzle, they found on the sand an Indian cane, which

answered the purpose admirably. By means of their bellow they forged the irons for the rudder out of old hoops. A saw they made out of a two-edged sword, which one of the passengers, Senhor Odivellas, a rich Portuguese merchant, wore when he was cast ashore. Tongue cannot describe the joy they felt, as day by day they saw the boat, upon which all their hopes were cast, rise slowly from the sand. Every one assisted; they toiled day and night; and in fourteen days it was completed.

This is the bright side of the picture. The other side is very black indeed. Pestilence broke out among the unhappy men, and every day witnessed the death of more than one heart-broken miserable man. The priests were all in all to the dying. No holy viaticum had they wherewith to strengthen the parting soul; but on the desolate sea-shore, beneath the rude cross reared high above their heads, these servants of God set up the tribunal of penance. And there the sinner made his peace with God, it may be more perfectly than if he had lived to be absolved upon his bed. The space around was set apart for burials, and deep in the sand the survivors dug the narrow graves of their departed brethren, each not knowing how soon his own turn might come. There the priests buried them with as much as might be of the solemn rites of holy Church, and set up a holy cross to mark the spot where every one was laid. The crosses have been long washed away, and the waves perhaps have disturbed the remains that rested underneath; but the souls of the dead are with the Saints, we trust. Let us say a *De profundis* for the faithful who lie on that solitary sand in the Indian Ocean.

They might have suffered from famine as well as from sickness, if Almighty God had not sent them food. It rained every day; and they found a tank, in which a large supply of water was always kept. The islet was *also frequented* by a vast number of sea-fowl, who *seemed to* know no fear, and allowed themselves to be

taken by the hand. These birds laid their eggs on the bare ground. A quantity of fish were found to resort to the shallows, and were easily caught. Thus, however dreary the place, the mercy of God was manifested in many ways, as Father André was not slow to point out. Nevertheless, they watched the progress of the boat with great anxiety, and when it was finished they sang the *Te Deum* for joy.

But when it was all ready to be launched, they were doomed to a terrible disappointment. The seams of the rude bark were not water-tight, and they had not wherewith to caulk them. In their distress they applied for advice to Father André, who taught them that this misfortune, which seemed to blast all their hopes, was sent that, after all, they should owe their safety to God alone. He then recommended them to have recourse to Mary, the Star of the Sea; and they went in procession round the island singing the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. The next morning they found cast up by the sea a barrel of pitch from the ship. This boon they joyfully regarded as a miraculous answer to their prayer, and with shreds of rope picked to pieces and steeped in pitch, they made the seams of their vessel water-tight.

Nevertheless, it was dreaded by the most experienced of their number that the frail bark would never live in a stormy sea, on account of the thinness of the planks, unless something were done to strengthen them; and in this fresh difficulty they were again providentially assisted. A portion of the wreck was washed ashore containing six rolls of lead, and some balls of the same metal. These were placed on a flat stone and hammered thin, and then laid as a coating over all the lower and the most exposed portions of the boat. She was then pronounced to be perfectly seaworthy, if only favoured by fair winds and the assistance of the Almighty. Father André blessed the new boat in the usual form, and sprinkled it with holy water, after which it was launched into the sea. When the poor ship-

wrecked men saw her swimming safely upon the waves, they felt that if God had wrought a special miracle in their behalf, He could not have assisted them more signally; and in gratitude to Him they named her the "Mercy of God." She was moored off the sand by two cables, and preparations were immediately made for her departure. That very evening there came a storm, and the little boat seemed doomed to be lost on the very day of her birth. But the next morning being calm, Don Alvaro went on board with fifty-seven persons. They were found too many for the capacities of the frail bark; and with great sorrow the captain was compelled to land thirteen. There was a large number still left on the sand out of the four hundred who had been wrecked in the "Conception." Among them were the three fathers, who steadily refused to quit the spot while there was one man left who could go instead, although Don Alvaro and the forty-four who sailed with him were most anxious that one of the priests should accompany them, to be their consolation in death and their counsel in life. But the heroic priests preferred to stay with the greater number.

After the "Mercy of God" had set sail, those who were left behind gave themselves up to despair, and walked up and down the strip of sand with haggard faces, dreading death and loathing life. Disease was almost gone; but in its place came the direst famine. The provisions which had been saved from the "Conception" were consumed; and the poor men were now dependent on the sea-fowl, and such fish as they could catch. Day after day some died of famine; and the priests, who were the only stay of the survivors, were themselves almost dead with exhaustion. Nevertheless they still maintained their confidence in God, and often assembled their unhappy companions for prayers and litanies.

As the sea continued at intervals to wash up broken *pieces of* the wreck, the fathers proposed that they *should construct* a raft, and make an attempt to escape

from the island. The available materials for a boat had all been used in the construction of the "Mercy of God;" but there remained enough of heavy spars and large timbers to make a raft which should be capable of holding a large number. All eagerly acceded to the proposal, and gave themselves heartily to the work. It was soon made; for it consisted only of a framework of rafters boarded with planks. They had great difficulty in floating it; but when it was in the water, having no sides or other protection from the waves, all refused to trust their lives to the very mode of escape they had themselves contrived. The three fathers, perceiving that the danger of drowning in the sea was not greater than that of starving on the sand, boldly leaped upon the raft, and their example was speedily followed by a few of the bravest of their companions. The rest preferred to remain, and trust to the chance of succour from the cutter. Alas, they waited in vain! The cutter reached India in safety, and started again for the island; but the sand was never found. It was too small an object to be descried in the great Indian Ocean, and the unhappy mariners upon it must have died of starvation.

The cutter, after encountering more than one storm, performed its voyage safely, as has been said, and brought up in the port of Goa. Captain Noluc immediately reported to the deputy-governor, Francesco Barreto, acting in place of the viceroy, lately dead, the loss of his ship, and the forlorn condition of the abandoned crew,—requesting immediate assistance. The affecting narrative awakened in Goa the most lively commiseration. With what tears of joy the dying girl received her lame brother, and what blessings with her latest breath she invoked upon the head of Father Pascal, to whose generous devotion she owed their meeting, we may well conceive. She died shortly after the arrival of the cutter; and her lame Alfonso, after closing her eyes, returned in search of his benefactor with the good captain, under whose command

governor had fitted out two ships for the voyage of discovery.

They set sail from Goa with a fair wind for the island, which they believed to be the same with the shoal called the Pero dos Banhos; and Masses were offered in every church for the success of the expedition. The captain and the mate, Pedro Fonseca, held long consultations as to the course to be pursued; for in those days the art of navigation was so ill-understood, and the charts were so imperfect, that the best seamen could not make certain of hitting a particular spot in the wide ocean.

These consultations the lame Alfonso watched with the most intense eagerness; always saying, "Captain, thinkest thou that we shall find them all alive?" or, "Captain, shall we soon be there?" and then the captain would answer, "As God wills, Alfonso." And this was repeated every day; and the captain soon learned to love the lame boy for his fidelity and gratitude to Father Pascal.

One day, not long after they had left Goa, as Alfonso was standing on the prow of the vessel, with his eyes fixed, as they ever were, on the far horizon, he suddenly seized the captain's arm, and said, "I see it; I see it."

"What dost thou see, Alfonso? There is nothing in sight but the blue waves, and yonder large-winged albatross."

"Oh, yes, I see it; I see it—the island! the island!" and the lame boy forgot his lameness, and leaped about the deck for joy.

Then the captain, looking steadfastly in the direction to which Alfonso had pointed, did indeed see a dark speck far off; but he said, "It cannot be the island—it is some vessel. But haply her crew have seen our shipmates. We will sail towards her and inquire."

As they neared the spot, the captain said to the *mate, "What thinkest thou, Pedro; what is that dark object?"*

"It is no ship," said the mate; "it is some rock above the sea."

"It is no rock," said the captain. "I know not what it is."

They were now not far from it, and they perceived it was a boat; but such an one as they had never seen before; and men were looking over the side. Presently a hoarse sound, as of a cry of distress, was borne across the waters. Still the captain never conjectured the truth, till the lame boy exclaimed: "I see Alvaro, who was left upon the island."

Every voice was hushed in mute expectation: not a sound was heard but the dashing of the waves against the keel and the wind whistling through the rigging. All eyes were fixed upon the boat; but when they came alongside of the "Mercy of God," and the well-known faces were seen, marked, indeed, with hunger, but the same in feature, one universal shout rent the air.

"A miracle! a miracle!" exclaimed every voice; and not an eye was dry throughout the ship, not a knee unbent upon the deck. The lame boy alone shared not in the general joy; he looked every where, and saw no Father Pascal.

The crew of the "Mercy of God"—and well did the frail bark merit the name—were at once taken into the ship. Their tale was soon told. On leaving the island they had been almost swamped by a huge fish, which had rushed up against their boat and broken her sides. Happily the leaden covering had preserved them from the water; and just as they were becoming short of provisions, they fell in with a shoal of fish, which continued to follow the boat. They caught the fish with a hook made of a carpenter's gimlet. Their whole voyage had been one unbroken series of mercies. Without a compass, and ignorant in which direction to steer, they had sailed straight for Goa. God was their pilot, and the mercy of God their bark: little marvel that their voyage was prosperous.

Captain Noluc sent his rescued crew home in the other ship, while himself prosecuted the search for the island,—unsuccessfully, as has been said. After a long and fruitless cruise, he was compelled to return to Goa, the poor lame boy heart-broken that Father Pascal should be thus abandoned to his fate upon the barren island. He did not long survive the affliction.

But Father Pascal had, as we have seen, embarked with the other priests, and a few others, upon the raft. They started on their perilous voyage eight months after the loss of the "Conception," and for two months the wretched crew were tossed about at the mercy of the waves. They had only a few pieces of dried shark's flesh to subsist upon. However, rain fell, and they caught a little fish. In their misfortunes they were throughout supported by the fathers, who continually showed them the example of holy resignation. At length, after losing four of their number, they were cast upon another island; but it proved to be almost as desolate and barren as that they had left. From it, however, could be seen, about three miles off, a coast fringed with palm-trees, and promising a more hospitable resting-place. Twice they essayed to reach it, and twice they were driven back by the violence of the sea, so exhausted, that only the very bravest of them dared to make a third attempt. The three fathers again stayed with those who were left behind, and their devotion cost them their lives. The raft succeeded in reaching the other island, where they found groves of palm-trees, fresh and dry cocoa-nuts, with plenty of wholesome vegetables and an abundant supply of fresh water. Famished with hunger, they unhappily ate too much, and were seized with sickness, which prevented their immediate return to their companions. They did not return for a month, and at the end of that time only two were found living; the three priests and all the rest of their companions had died. These two told *heart-rending* tales of the agony endured by their *deceased brethren*, and especially by the priests, who had

sunk from sheer exhaustion and famine, after superhuman efforts to comfort and soothe the dying.

The two survivors were taken off to the more fruitful island, and there they continued till their strength was restored, when they all again put to sea, after loading the bark with a good supply of cocoa-nuts and other fruits. They foresaw that death must eventually seize them if they remained there. Confiding themselves therefore to their angel-guardians, they pushed off from the only hospitable shore they had touched since they left Portugal. Surely it was only by the direct and manifest assistance of God that at length they reached the harbour for which they had been originally bound. On the 27th November, 1556, fifteen months after the stranding of the "Conception," they crossed the bay of Cochin.

On nearing the land, they were astonished to see the shore lined with people, apparently waiting to welcome them. "How is this?" said they one to another; "are we expected? is our story known?" Even so. As Father Goncalo de Silveyra was preaching in Cochin, he suddenly stopped, and leaned his head on the pulpit; and then looking up again, he said that there had almost reached the shores some who had escaped from the ship which Francesco Noluc had commanded. The congregation, in astonishment, ran down to the sea. So long a time had elapsed since the loss of the "Conception" that few believed that any of the unfortunate crew could now be living; and after the return of the expedition of discovery, their fate had naturally been considered hopeless. But when the crowd arrived at the beach, and beheld some men, as it seemed walking, on the sea,—for they saw no boat,—they were filled with astonishment and fear. Are they men or spirits? While they were wondering, the raft was washed ashore by the tide, and a few emaciated figures stepped on the land and fell down upon their knees. They were received as men raised from the dead, and the inhabitants of Cochin vied with each other in showing them good-will.

That a shapeless raft, without compass or helm, should cross five hundred leagues of stormy ocean, and at length be tossed upon the very port to which the adventurous men belonged, who, confiding in God, had trusted themselves to its fortunes—a fact that is as much matter of evidence as any historical statement whatever—is certainly of the nature of a miracle, and will accordingly be disbelieved. But it is only more extraordinary than the meeting of the "Mercy of God" with the very ships which were sent in search of the island. The whole history of the adventures of the crew, whether on the sand or in the "Mercy of God," or in the raft, is full of proof of the watchful care of Almighty God. If the unhappy men suffered greatly, they were also greatly favoured; and in nothing more perhaps than in the presence of the three priests, to whom it was not indeed given, as to other martyrs, to die for the faith, but of whom it may certainly be said that they gave their lives for their brethren. We cannot doubt that they are now enjoying the reward of their great charity.

XII.

FOUNDATION OF THE ABBEY OF ANCHIN.

A.D. 1079.

IT was the evening of a sultry day in summer. The sun had sunk to rest behind a curtain of flaming clouds; but the air was filled with heated vapour, which caught its fiery rays, and shed a glowing light upon the plain beneath. The country people of Montigny, a village near the town of Douay, were busy in the corn-field. The last cart-load was filled, and, according to ancient custom, they had twined the golden sheaves with garlands of the brightest wild-flowers they could gather. The strong-limbed oxen seemed almost to stagger as they drew the heavy wain along; the labourers walked on either side joyfully singing their "harvest-home,"—a song, indeed, of praise to Him who openeth His hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness.

They had now passed out of the field, and were proceeding along a narrow lane, when they had to stop and make way for three horsemen, who were advancing at a leisurely pace. The first two were serving-men, as was plain from their apparel—a parti-coloured surcoat of yellow and black; one carried a falcon on his wrist; the other, a youth of seventeen, was discours-

ing gaily to his companion; they had soon passed by, and their voices died away in the distance. Behind them, mounted on a gallant steed, rode their master: the peasants uncovered as he approached, and saluted him reverently. The stranger returned their salutation with a kind courtesy, and moved slowly forward, oppressed, as it seemed, as much by his own heavy thoughts as by the heat of the stagnant air.

The Lord of Courcelles had, indeed, enough to trouble him; for beside the public cares which devolved upon him as a nobleman, and one of the most distinguished cavaliers of the day, he was burdened with a long-standing feud between his house and that of his indefatigable enemy, Walter, Lord of Montigny in Ostrevant. The quarrel had its origin in some trifling dispute: but pride had kept it up; blood had lately flowed; and now both parties were possessed with a conviction that nothing less than the death of one or other of them could terminate the strife, or allay the devouring hatred with which he was consumed. It was the thought of this that haunted Sohier as he rode along; and so absorbed was he in his moody contemplation, that he did not perceive that he had long since wandered away from his attendants, and, leaving the cultivated plain, had plunged deeper and deeper into a wild and desert region. Night had suddenly fallen; the dull grey clouds were rent from time to time with flashes of vivid lightning; the atmosphere grew heavier every moment, and wearied with his long day's journey the cavalier nodded drowsily over the neck of his horse, who proceeded steadily on his way. The first large drops of a coming storm, rustling among the leaves above his head, recalled him to consciousness. He gazed about him in bewilderment, and discovered that he had left the beaten track, and was in the midst of a thick forest. Urging on his steed, he made his way at length to an open space where four ways met. Here he once more looked anxiously around for *something to direct* him in his course; but having tried

in vain to pierce the uncertain gloom, he was about to leave himself to the guidance of his horse, when what seemed like the twinkling of a taper in the distance caught his eye. "Thanks to our Lady, and St. Julian the blessed hospitaller," he cried, "I shall find shelter for the night."

He struggled on, as best he could, towards the welcome light, and was delighted to find himself, drenched as he was, under the walls of a strong and stately castle situated on the edge of the forest. The drawbridge was raised; the knight could hear the rain-drops plashing in the deep moat below; and now, for the first time, he became aware that the light he had followed was the flame of the watchfire in the bell-tower. All this gave token that the evening was far advanced; but the cavalier put to his lips the horn he carried suspended from his belt, and blew a loud and shrill blast.

"Who art thou, and what cravest thou at this hour?" said a voice from the rampart.

"I am a cavalier who has lost his way in the forest, and I crave but shelter for the night."

There was silence for a few moments; then the knight heard the grating of the chains as the bridge was slowly lowered. Several men-at-arms, with torches in their hands, appeared under the archway.

"This way, sir knight," said one; "my lord is but now sitting down to his repast, and inviteth thee to sup with him."

"May God reward him for his courtesy!" replied Sohier gladly, as he crossed the drawbridge.

Escorted by the servants, he traverses the court; and as he reaches the flight of steps beyond, he is greeted by a voice which says to him, "Welcome, sir knight; a hearty welcome!"

"Thanks,—a thousand thanks!" responded Sohier, as he followed his host, who ushered him into the large hall where supper was already served; and there, under the glare of the flaming torches, and the brilliant radiance of numerous waxen lights ranged along the

walls, the two cavaliers for the first time beheld each other.

In the instant both started back astounded.

"What!—is it thou?" exclaimed the lord of the castle.

"It is I," replied Sohier calmly.

"And thou art within my good castle of Montigny," rejoined Walter, for he it was; and for a moment he seemed to be struggling with some violent emotion. Then, recovering himself as with an effort, he continued, "Thou art welcome, my Lord of Courcelles; this evening, this night, fear no evil either from me or from my people; feast at my table; rest within my walls. But to-morrow—when thou hast left this castle, beware of me: then am I no longer thy host, but thine enemy."

Sohier at once understood, and frankly accepted terms so congenial with the wild chivalrous notions of the age. He grasped the hand which his host extended to him, and the two mortal enemies seated themselves side by side at the upper end of the table. The cup went round; mirth and pleasantry enlivened the board, and the curfew-bell had rung long ere the two cavaliers said their grace and retired to rest.

The best apartment in the castle had been assigned to the Lord of Courcelles; the floor was covered with fresh straw, mingled with field-flowers and boughs of trees; a bright fire burned on the spacious hearth under its vast canopy of stone; the couch, raised high from the ground, was surrounded with thick curtains; and on the *prie-Dieu* by the bedside lay a Psalter, in costly binding, for the use of such priests, clerics, and monks, and other devout and literate persons, as from time to time shared the hospitality of the castle. Though but a cavalier, Sohier was learned for that age: he knew how to read; he took up the sacred volume, therefore, and as he opened it, his eyes fell on these words: "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword deliver me" (Ps. xlii. 7). He opened it again, and read: "*Behold, how* good and how pleasant a thing it is for

brethren to dwell together!" (Ps. cxxxii. 1.) A third time he opened it, and read: "I will not enter into the tabernacle of my house, nor ascend unto the couch of my rest; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to my eyelids, nor rest to the temples of my head, until I have found a place for the Lord" (Ps. cxxxi. 3-5). These words struck him forcibly, and long time he meditated upon them before he lay down to rest; he wondered, too, as he thought how at that very moment he was lying under the roof of the inveterate enemy of his house; and more than once he said to himself that, after all, Walter was a courteous knight, and one of a frank and generous spirit. With his mind tossed to and fro by these various thoughts, and rocked, as it were, to rest by the soothing melodies of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, the knight at length fell asleep.

The red beams of the sun were gilding the tall towers of the castle of Montigny when Walter quietly entered the chamber of his guest to pay him his morning civilities. Sohier was kneeling at the *prie-Dieu*, his face buried in his hands; at the sound, however, of a step behind him, he turned his head, and his countenance showed that he was agitated by some strong emotion.

Walter, as though he perceived nothing unusual, expressed a hope that his guest had rested well.

"Thanks, sir knight, for your courtesy," replied Sohier; "I have slept; but my sleep was broken by disturbing dreams. Methought I was upon an islet near this castle, when I met a white stag of a marvellous size and beauty; the beast came towards me, threw me on the ground, tore out my bowels, and trailed them round the island."

"Strange!" replied his host; "I also have had exactly the same dream. I thought I was on the island where the Blessed Saint Gordian led for many years a hermit's life, with no companions save wild-beasts; like you, sir knight, I encountered a large white stag, who

goaded me with his antlers, and tore out my bowels. I try in vain to shake off the impression left upon my mind."

"Is the island far from here?" asked the knight thoughtfully.

"Oh, no! you can see it from the windows of the castle."

"Then with your good pleasure let us go thither together."

Together they went; and passing through a rich meadow, arrived at the banks of a little stream, whose limpid waters sparkled in the morning sun. This stream embraced within its circuit the islet on which the saintly recluse had lived so long, there exchanging the society of men for the companionship of angels. Crossing the rivulet on the trunk of a fallen tree, the two cavaliers stood within the hallowed ground. Every thing around them breathed a holy calm. Amidst a thicket of beech-trees might be seen some fragments of ruined walls, and a few half-broken arches, over which ivy had thrown its mantle of dark-green leaves.

"These are the remains of the church which St. Gordian raised," said the Lord of Montigny; "here he lived, here he died, and here his bones repose."

They advanced in silence a few steps, when suddenly before them, in the long deep grass, they beheld a tall white stag, which receded as they approached, and rapidly disappeared. As if entranced, they both stood still; a heavenly voice seemed to speak to their hearts in that spot blessed by the penances, the prayers, and the good works of God's servant. Sohier at length took Walter's hand within his own, and in a voice of deep emotion said,

"Messire, long time has there been war between us; our friends, our relatives, our vassals, have suffered great woes on our account, and many have perished miserably. God, our sovereign Lord, warns us that *it is time to* bring forth fruits of penance: for myself, *my resolution* is taken; if you have the same

desire, and will agree to remain here, in this island, like the Blessed Gordian, I will willingly bear you company."

At these words, Walter of Montigny threw himself upon the neck of his foe, and cried, "You have spoken to my heart, my brother: everlasting peace be henceforth between us, and union in God!"

Without delay the two noblemen put their design into execution. They assembled their friends together, and by a public reconciliation put the seal to the amity by which they had already bound themselves. They obtained from Gerard II., Bishop of Cambray, a grant of the Isle of Anchin, whither the mysterious dream had led them. They threw all they had into a common fund, and with seven others of gentle birth, whom their example had drawn from a secular life, they ranged themselves under the austere rule of St. Benedict. At first, a modest oratory was raised, and dedicated to the Saviour, the Blessed Virgin, and all Saints; but seven years afterwards, A.D. 1086, the foundations were laid of a magnificent church, the four pointed steeples of which were long celebrated throughout Flanders. The holy thought of Sohier and Walter had borne abundant fruit; God had blessed their charity and fidelity to grace:—thus was founded the Abbey of Anchin.

This religious house, which existed till the year 1792, produced many holy and learned men. It embraced the reform of Cluny, at the instance of Alvise, a friend of the great St. Bernard. The monks of this abbey occupied themselves, among other things, with copying manuscripts; and these humble artists of the cloister executed illuminated designs and miniatures which would have done honour to the most celebrated painters of those ages of faith. The abbey itself was a monument of architectural skill, and contained within it both marbles and pictures precious in all Catholic eyes, not only for their intrinsic merit, but for the associations that hung about them. But neither art nor

holy associations had power over the sacrilegious destroyers of 1793; and out of all the various treasures of that venerable pile nothing was saved but a few manuscripts, since deposited in the library of Douay, and a striking picture (still extant) attributed to the artist Memling, representing the Most Holy Trinity adored by the ever-blessed Virgin, the choirs of the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, Anchorites, by the warrior-knights of the Cross, and all the glorious hosts that people the courts of heaven. The rich marbles were defaced and sawn asunder to serve for table-slabs, window-sills, and chimney-pieces; the tombs turned into troughs for cattle; the paintings which adorned the sanctuary scattered to the four winds; the consecrated vessels and holy reliquaries of solid gold sold as so much precious metal. Of the abbey itself, that gigantic pile, there remains but a few foundation-stones, level with the earth and whitening with age, like so many huge bones laid bare by the rude hand of time; and ere many years have gone by, the people will not be able to point out the spot where so many saints abode, so many heroes lie buried, and where generations of their fathers found food, shelter, and a home.

The abbey was situated two leagues distant from Douay, on the banks of the Scarpe. It bore as its arms, in memory of its founders' dream, a white stag on an azure field, strewn with lilies of gold, with this scroll, "*Inter lilia pascit:* He feeds among the lilies."

XIII.

OUR LADY OF MERCY.

I.

RETURN OF THE CRUSADER.

DAY was declining; already the mists of evening were gathering in the valleys, when a horseman, who had been for some time skirting the shores of the Mediterranean, plunged at length into a deep and winding ravine, whose lofty sides were thickly clothed with pines. Both horse and rider gave signs of a long and fatiguing journey; but in spite of his well-worn mantle, soiled helmet, and arms rusted with rain, the countenance of the young cavalier appeared radiant with happiness. With eager joy he spurred on his steed, casting, as he went, looks of tender interest around him, as though he recognised at each fresh turn of the road some dear familiar object, and ejaculating to himself with a sort of rapturous emotion, indicated no less by the smile that played on his lips, and the tear that glistened in his eye. When he reached a certain point in the road he stopped,—it was before a little image of our Lady, placed in a half-ruined niche; there, joining his hands devoutly together, he cried aloud, "O Mother of Mercy, thanks to thy tender care, I once more behold my beloved country. Here, as I departed for the holy war, I made my vow before thee; and here, as is meet, I promise to perform it. On this spot will I raise a chapel and hospice for pilgrims; hither will I myself come each year to visit thy holy image; and on the same day will I relieve with great devotion thirty-three poor

men, in honour of the thirty-three years which thy dear Son lived with thee on earth. O Virgin, ever blessed, have pity on thy poor servant!"

With reason might Berenger d'Elvaz thank the Lord, whose almighty hand had delivered him out of so many perils. He had gone to the crusade as a faithful vassal of St. Louis. Wounded at Mansoura, he had endured a hard captivity in the house of an Egyptian emir, nor had recovered his liberty till the King of France had paid a million bezants of gold for his followers' ransom, and surrendered Damietta in payment for his own freedom; and now, at last, he had returned over sea to his own dear land of Provence, and to the home of his fathers, so fondly remembered. He was returning, it is true, a poor knight, possessed of nothing but his own good sword; but abundance awaited him in his father's halls: he was wearied and worn with travel, but what affectionate solicitude would not his mother and his sister lavish upon him! He pictured to himself their joy, and in imagination anticipated his own. He thought of the ancient retainers who had known him from a child; he forgot not even his poor faithful dog, who, perhaps, already had instinctively divined the near approach of his master. "Come, Valiant," said he to his horse, "let us push along; a few steps further, and we shall be at home. Once there, a good stable, plenty of fodder, and careful grooming will be yours. Push on, then, Valiant, my brave steed!"

The docile animal set himself to a canter, and soon the young traveller beheld through the increasing darkness the tall shadowy outline of the castle of Elvaz. His heart leaped within him at the sight; but he observed with surprise that no light glimmered through the narrow windows, not a sound could he hear from the ramparts.

"They are in the northern hall," said he, as if to re-assure himself; "my father is playing chess with *the chaplain; my* mother and my sister ply the distaff;

the varlets are busy somewhere; I will soon make them hear me."

So saying, he took the horn that hung at his belt, and sounded the once familiar notes by which he was wont to announce his return from the chase. No answer. Seized with impatience, he rode on; the drawbridge was down, in spite of the lateness of the hour. Berenger crossed it. Beneath the dark vault over which rose the belfry tower, he found neither servants nor men-at-arms. He shouted; the echo of the ramparts alone replied. He advanced into the court, and all around him was silence, darkness, absolute solitude. "Good God!" he cried, "what has happened?"

At this moment the moon struggled through the thick mantle of clouds with which she was enveloped, and poured a flood of light upon the castle. Berenger gazed around him, struck with a secret and undefinable terror; and it seemed as if the life-blood froze in his veins when he beheld the scene of desolation that was now disclosed. The castle was a ruin; the roofs were uncovered, the windows displayed their gaping recesses, stripped of glass and hangings; masses of rubbish strewed the pavement of the court in every direction; fragments of richly-carved furniture, costly armour, broken ornaments, parchments with large waxen seals attached, lay scattered on the ground; fire and pillage seemed to have spared nothing but the massive walls, which themselves bore the mark of flames. At this sight Berenger leaped from his horse, and, almost beside himself with terror, opened a window, the fastenings of which some hostile hand no doubt had shattered, and entered the armour-room, where once he used to tilt with his father and his old retainers.

"My father!" he called aloud; "my father! where are you? My mother! Alice, my sister! answer me."

"Holloa! who calls?" replied a voice which proceeded from a corner of the vast and gloomy hall.

Berenger rushed to the spot whence the sound seemed to come, stretched out his hands, and encoun-

tered the arm of a man clothed in a coarse garment of goats' hair.

"Who are you?" cried the young knight; and he dragged the unknown to the window, through which the beams of the moon were falling.

The two looked into each others' faces.

"Is it you? is it indeed you, my lord?" said the man, as he fell at the feet of Berenger. "You are still alive! Do you not know me? I am James Lerouge, the goatherd, once the companion of your sports."

"Yes, I know you, my poor James. But—tell me—what has happened? My father, my mother, my sister,—in the name of God, where are they?"

The man drew back; then, with a look of the deepest horror, answered, as he grasped the young man's arm: "Your father, your mother, the Lady Alice, are all dead—slain by John de Melfort, the ancient enemy of your house. They lie buried in the chapel."

Berenger's knees tottered under him; he supported himself against the wall, and fixed his haggard eyes upon the goatherd.

The latter resumed: "It was believed that you had perished at Mansoura. Melfort, no longer fearing your return, fell upon us. Vassals, men-at-arms, all were massacred. My lord was slain defending his daughter; your sister was pierced with an arrow, and your venerable mother died of grief. The wretches pillaged the castle, leaving the bodies of their victims without burial. But the monks of St. Benedict laid them in consecrated earth. For myself, I was left for dead in a corner of the court yonder; but I recovered from my wounds, and continued with my flock to inhabit the place in which I had been bred. I never believed that you were dead; I looked for your return, and, besides, I had somewhat to say to you."

"What?" said the young man eagerly.

"John de Melfort has a castle, a wife, and a daughter. *Revenge* is sweet!"

II.

PETER NOLASCO.

DAY had broken fair and bright; a man clothed in a white habit, and wearing a scapular on which shone a shield of gules and gold, was approaching along the path that led to Elvaz. He walked with a firm step, seeming to contemplate with delight the leafy thickets, the banks covered with wild thyme, the ripples of the sparkling stream which ran babbling along its rocky bed, and repeating from time to time in an under-tone verses from the Psalms, as though using the strains of the royal prophet to sing the praises of the Lord of all. Stopping under the walls of the castle, he cast his eyes over the ruined towers, and said to himself: "I will go into the chapel, and pray a moment over its deserted tombs."

He crossed the drawbridge, no longer guarded by men-at-arms; he entered the court-yard, and appeared struck with astonishment on beholding a young man standing with his back against the ramparts, and gazing with a mournful countenance on the havoc that surrounded him. The monk approached; and moved by a lively feeling of compassion, thus addressed him: "My son, what doest thou alone in this deserted spot? The masters of the castle are no more; but you look pale and wan—are you ill? tell me. If you are hungry, I have bread and figs in my wallet. If you are ill, I am somewhat of a leech."

Whilst the good religious was thus speaking with a tender earnestness, Berenger slowly raised his head, and casting on him a look at once cold and calm, said, in a low voice, more terrible than the wildest cry of despair: "I am Berenger d'Elvaz."

"What, my dear son!" exclaimed the monk, "are you, then, alive? Alas! it has been God's will to lay most heavy trials on you; yet doubtless He has given you the strength and faith to bear them. But why re-

breastplate and belt of a knight; I felt all the excitement of worldly passions. I speak to you, then, as one who has had experience of human glory; and I tell you that, if to our blinded eyes there be a certain grandeur in an insatiable revenge, there is that which is infinitely grander and more noble in the generous forgiveness which triumphs, not over an enemy prostrate at our feet, but over the haughty passions of our own heart."

"But, father, you do not understand me; leave me."

"My son, my brother, I will not leave you; for the hour of despair is no time for good resolutions. God has sent me hither: blessed be His divine providence, which does nothing in vain!"

"But know you," cried Berenger impatiently, "you who want me to forgive like a coward,—know you the evil this man has done me? Do you know that, after two long years of hard captivity, I return with a heart bounding with hope and joy, longing for love, full to overflowing with the tenderest affection for my aged parents and my young sister; and, thanks to this Melfort, find, instead of my father's hearth, yon three tombstones? Did he not revenge on a few poor vassals, an old man, and two women, the wrongs of his ancestors; and shall I not render him woe for woe, pang for pang? I tell you that, all night long, as I paced these deserted courts, by the side of the graves where all that I love lies buried, I heard dear familiar voices crying, 'Strike and avenge us!' and I will obey."

"No, my son, your grief deceives you; I knew those for whom you mourn. Your father was a just man, your mother a noble and pious lady, your young sister an angel of innocence; they have entered into the rest of the saints, and they pray for pardon on their murderer; they heap upon his head, not the burning coals of vengeance, but the riches of a glowing charity. Oh, no, blessed souls! it is not revenge you ask of the Lord; you ask but to see your enemy pardoned, and

throned in glory with you for all eternity. But your child, your brother, still bound with the cords of the flesh, cannot understand you."

"Your words grieve me," said Berenger; "and yet your voice is that of a friend."

"Ah! doubt it not, my brother; that grief of which you have made me sole confidant binds us together for ever. In the name of the friendship with which you have inspired me, grant me one favour. Our monastery is not far from hence,—deign to accept its hospitality; our house shall be your home; there you will find fathers, brothers, ready to welcome you; and your projects, whatever they be, will ripen in silence and reflection. Leave this dreary place, and come to the abode which the Lord offers to you."

"Who are you? what is your name?" asked the young man.

"I am a knight of Our Lady of Mercy," replied the monk, "and my name is Peter Nolasco."

III.

THE CAPTIVE'S DAUGHTER.

Ten years have passed away. The Order of Mercy possesses a commandery at the gates of Montpelier, from which, as from an advanced post of charity, issues forth from day to day the valiant chivalry of the Cross to defend the countries of Europe against the invasion of the Saracens, or, more heroic still, to rescue their victims from their hands in the very heart of their bagnios and amidst the sands of the desert.

It was towards this holy retreat, whose white walls were conspicuous from afar, that about mid-day a young girl might be seen directing her steps, accompanied by a youth and an aged serving-man. After crossing the drawbridge, they stopped under the donjon-keep, from

the summit of which floated the banner of the order; there they spoke a few words to a sentinel, who pointed out the way to the cloister. The youthful inquirers paused, as if awe-struck, at the entrance of that wide enclosure, where already some of the brave companions of Peter Nolasco and Raymond of Pennafort were taking their peaceful and glorious rest. Their modest tombs rose in the centre of the court; around, under the vaulted cloister, walked in silence a number of knights and priests, the former wearing their white tunic and mantle, the latter having their habit of the same snowy purity embroidered with the arms of the king of Aragon,—token of the affection borne by that truly Christian prince for the noble order of Redemption. Nothing disturbed the quiet seclusion of the place, save the measured fall of their feet upon the pavement, and the rustling of their long robes of serge as they paced continually to and fro.

At length a priest, perceiving the maiden and her companions, approached her. He was a man still in the prime of life; but his sorrow-stricken brow, and his hair prematurely sprinkled with grey, seemed to mark him as one who in the world had encountered wrongs and sufferings such as had left wounds in his soul which time as yet had but imperfectly healed. In a voice full of sweetness he asked: "Maiden, what seekest thou?"

"Alas, sir!" she answered; "we are two unhappy children, well-nigh orphans, I might say, though our father and mother are both still living. One is a captive among the Saracens, and the other is dying of anxiety and grief."

"Your father is in slavery?"

"Yes, sir. He had gone to Barcelona to receive a legacy bequeathed him by a friend of my mother's, and was returning in confidence to Provence, when the galley in which he had embarked was taken by the Barbary corsairs. Resistance was vain, the infidels carried him off into slavery; and we have reason to believe

that he is now at Tangiers. My noble father a slave! —put up to sale!" Tears and sobs interrupted her words, and her brother wept at seeing her weep.

"Compose yourself, my child," said the monk; "your father shall be redeemed."

"Ah, noble sir, we shall count nothing too costly for his ransom. See; my mother has given me her jewels, her bracelets, and her rings: we will pledge our lands,—every thing we possess. If only you will consent to go to my father's rescue, we will put into your hands a sum more than sufficient for his redemption; we have faithful vassals, too, and tried friends, and there is not one amongst them but would contribute to the deliverance of the Lord of Melfort."

"Melfort, did you say? Melfort!" cried the monk. "Your father's name is—"

"John de Melfort, sir. If you are of Provence, you know it is no ignoble name."

"I know it!" said the monk, in a low stern voice; "I know it, alas, too well!"

He turned away; his eyes for an instant gleamed fiercely, the next he raised them to the crucifix which hung in the middle of the cloister: "O great God," he murmured, "and do such fierce passions still reign in a soul which Thy grace has vanquished? The voice of this child rouses in my soul feelings of hatred and revenge which I deemed stifled for ever! My father, my mother, my sister, what will you have me to do? Blessed souls, what is it you ask of me?"

He stood for some time silent, his eyes fixed on the divine crucifix; then, turning towards the children, he said in a voice of inexpressible sweetness, "I will myself go in search of your father, and, if it please God, will restore him to you. Pray for me, a miserable sinner."

A few hours afterwards, a monk, habited for a journey, was receiving on his knees the benediction of Peter Nolasco, the general of the order, who, as he embraced him, said: "Go, dear son, and spare neither your blood

nor your life in the service of your neighbour. Go, servant of Christ, follow in your Master's steps; forget not your vows, which oblige you to remain yourself in chains to deliver a Christian from captivity. Brother Berenger, farewell."

IV.

THE DELIVERANCE.

The watchman on the top of the tower of St. Victor's Abbey, at Marseilles, had just given warning that several vessels were on the point of entering the harbour; crowds were hurrying to the quay, and trying to distinguish the respective barks by their rigging, or their general trim, as they ran before the morning breeze. In the midst of the bustling noisy throng, yet somewhat apart, might be seen a little silent group; it consisted of a lady, wearing the black dress and headgear of a widow, a young girl, who clung timidly to her mother, and a handsome boy, twelve or thirteen years of age, who from time to time played carelessly with a tall greyhound by his side. An old servant stood behind them, and all were following eagerly with their eyes the white sails, which approached nearer and nearer every moment. The outline of the rigging was distinctly visible, sharply defined against the sky. The forms of three vessels in particular were now clearly discernible; and soon the spectators could distinguish the colours of their flags displayed at their bows.

The practised eye of a master-pilot at length recognised the leading vessel. "Praised be our Lady of La Garde! 'tis the *Happy Bark;* she comes from Palermo, and brings news of Monsieur d'Anjou, husband of Beatrice of Provence."

"And the second," broke in another, "is the sloop

St. Mary; she comes from Smyrna with fruits and perfumes."

The two ships thus announced rapidly entered the roads, amidst the acclamations of the crowd. The third still lagged behind in the distance, labouring heavily, as it seemed, against the wind, which had become less favourable.

The widow and her children stood anxiously watching her; though at times the poor lady would say, "It is of no use expecting, my children; it is God's will to try us."

"Mother!" suddenly exclaimed the boy; "look! —I see it clearly;—'tis the holy standard that floats on board that galley."

The widow turned pale, and pressed her hand upon her heart, fluttering between hope and fear. She gazed out again upon the waters; the flag unfurled itself in the breeze, and she saw plainly, on the white ground, the arms of Aragon, with the device, "*Redemptionem misit populo suo:* He gave redemption to His people."

"It is the *St. John Baptist,* the galley of the Redemptors!" cried the people.

"Great God!" said the widow, "is it possible? Holy Virgin! let me not be disappointed of my hope."

Still she gazed; and on the deck she beheld a man in a white habit.

"My mother," cried the young girl, "it is he,—it is the priest!"

"There is a captive on board. Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the mariners and people, whose attention was now strongly excited; "thanks to our Lady of La Garde! He shall hang up his chains at her altar."

The lady tottered to the water's edge; a mist came over her eyes; she dared not look up, dreading not to behold her husband, so long and fruitlessly expected; but the exclamations of her children and the shouts of the people forced her to raise her head. The vessel was close upon the quay; a man was landing from it,

wretchedly clad, his feet and hands loaded with chains; but his countenance,—'twas he! She uttered a cry, made a few steps forward, and fell swooning with joy into the arms of the captive.

He strained her to his heart, and extended his hand to bless his children, who, kneeling at his feet, were endeavouring to loosen the fetters which he had but just resumed; then turning towards the monk, who was at that moment leaving the galley, he cried: "My wife, my children, if you love me, love and bless this good religious; to him I owe my liberty, my life. Let all who love Melfort honour and bless this man of God!" Then, as the monk strove to move away, he grasped him by the arm, and in a still louder voice cried, "He sought me out on the verge of the Great Desert, whither my masters had carried me; he found me dying of the black plague. All had abandoned me; but, undeterred by the loathsome disease, he installed himself as my nurse; he cured me by his skill, or rather by his loving and tender care. The barbarians declared my ransom-money insufficient; he offered to remain himself in my stead; but this I called God and His blessed Mother to witness that I would not suffer. All this he did: and now,—hear me, my son, —I bid every one who bears the name of Melfort be henceforth the friend and servant of the Holy Order of Mercy."

As he concluded, a man wearing a cloth gown and cap pushed his way through the crowd, and said abruptly, "You are the Lord of Melfort! Do you know the name of your deliverer, messire?"

"He is called Brother Berenger; but what other name he bears I know not."

"I will tell it you, then. His name is Berenger, Lord of Elvaz,—Elvaz; do you hear? Ah, my master, my dear lord!" added the man, bathing the monk's hand with his tears, "I knew you."

Melfort had started back as if thunderstruck; he gazed at the monk with a sort of terror, as though

the dead had suddenly stood before him. "Berenger d'Elvaz!" he said at last; "can this be so?"

"Be so!" cried James Lerouge (for he it was); "I should have known my lord amongst a thousand. I was his serf, his liege-man; he freed me, and amply provided for me. I am now a free man and a burgher of the town: to him I owe all."

"And I too," said Melfort, falling on his knees before Berenger. "Servant of God, is it true—this that I hear? You knew who I was, and you saved my life at the peril of your own!"

"Kneel not to a sinner, my brother," said Berenger, raising the knight from the ground; "let us forget the past, and pray God to forgive us for all we have done against each other."

"It is your forgiveness I implore, that I may hope to be forgiven by God," answered Melfort; "but know, that from the day on which, to avenge my fathers' wrongs, I laid murderous hands upon your kindred, I have never had one peaceful night; the very prosperity which heaven bestowed upon me was bitterness to my heart. I shall believe myself pardoned only when you have forgiven me."

"Let this embrace be the pledge of my friendship," said Berenger, as he threw his arms round the hereditary enemy of his house; "and now come to the altar, where I am about to offer the Adorable Victim, and receive the pledge of the mercies of your God!—come, follow me."

They proceeded to the chapel of our Lady of La Garde, followed by James Lerouge and a crowd of people. The captive laid his chains at the feet of the miraculous image, and little children, according to ancient usage, replaced them with a garland of flowers. The Mass began; Berenger d'Elvaz, son and disciple of St. Peter Nolasco, immolated on the altar, once for aye, every remembrance of the ancient feud; and when, himself *livingly united* with the Saviour of mankind, he laid the *Holy Host on the* lips of Melfort, there remained no

longer those scions of two hostile houses, but twin brothers, united together in the bonds of divine charity by the noblest of all self-sacrifices and a gratitude as humble as it was profound.

The "Order of our Lady of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives" was founded in the year 1218 by Raymond of Pennafort, Peter Nolasco, knight, and James, king of Aragon. Knights and priests were alike associated, and bound by the same ordinary vow of obedience, poverty, and chastity, and by a special and extraordinary vow, couched in the following terms: "I, N., knight of our Lady of Mercy for the Redemption of Captives, hereby make solemn promise and profession to live solely for God, following the rule of St. Benedict; and if necessary for the deliverance of the faithful of Jesus Christ, I will remain a captive among the Saracens." This order, which rendered such immense services to Christianity, spread rapidly through France, Spain, and Portugal; it gave to the Church a number of canonised saints, among whom the most distinguished are its blessed founders just mentioned, St. Raymond Nonnatus, and St. Peter Paschal, Bishop of Jair, who was martyred by the Saracens.

The work of redeeming slaves continues in our own days, and after a manner, if possible, still more touching; it is performed by women, and the objects of their charity are the poor children of idolaters. The Nuns of the Good Shepherd have founded a house at Cairo, and another at Tunis, where they devote themselves to the redemption and Christian education of little girls purchased in the slave-market.

XIV.

JOHN DE LA CAMBE.

A.D. 1441-1461.

I.

THE KING OF THE THORN.

ALL Lille was keeping holiday, and the pale beams of a February sun, which for hours had been waging a doubtful strife with the dull grey clouds by which it was still beset, shone upon a brilliant cavalcade, which was passing through the crowded streets on its way to the market-place in the centre of the town. All the wealth and luxury which a prosperous commerce and an ever-restless industry enabled the Flemings of that day to display, seemed to be paraded in the gorgeous procession, half-religious, half-chivalrous in character, which, as it followed the devious course of the Gothic-built streets, looked like some winding stream chequered with divers bright and lively colours. Nothing was to be seen but one long fluttering array of velvet and silk, coats-of-arms richly emblazoned, precious jewels sparkling on the breasts or in the caps of the numerous horsemen, while the steeds themselves, tall and strong, and caparisoned with no less elegance than splendour, arched their proud necks, and tossed their noble heads, as conscious of the stately plumes with which they were adorned. In the centre of the cavalcade, mounted on a bay horse, advanced a young man of engaging appearance, clad in magnificent armour, and carrying in his hand a thorn-branch, as though it had been a sceptre. *Four* young girls on horseback, splendidly appareled, *held the gilded* reins of the courser on which rode the

hero of the fête; and before him went a squire, bearing his escutcheon of gules with a chevron of gold. The martial clang of the trumpets sounded merrily through the market-place, and the people thronged together from all sides, crying, "Hurrah! hurrah! long live Sir Joy! long live the King of the Thorn!"

The procession, after traversing the street of St. Peter, had passed in front of the venerable collegiate church dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles, and the palace of La Salle, the ancient residence of the Counts of Flanders, part of which has been converted into a hospital; thence, leaving on the left the castle of Courtray, with its cluster of sharp-pointed turrets, it swept along the street now called the *Grande Chaussée*, and reached the large square which lies to the north of the majestic church of St. Stephen. There might be seen that fountain so long famous for its beauty, and the graceful chapel to which popular admiration had given the name of "the Gem," both long since left to fall to ruin, or destroyed by revolutionary fury. The enclosure prepared for the tournament was strewn with fine sand, and surrounded by barriers decorated with the colours of the town, gules and gold. The ladies, magistrates, and certain strangers of distinction, were ranged on a platform gaily arrayed with tapestry and awnings. The marshals of the tourney kept the entrance to the lists, which they now threw open as the cavalcade approached. Proclamation was then made, in the name of the King of the Thorn, that he and his company were ready then and there to do battle with all comers from the various towns of Flanders, and especially from Valenciennes, Ghent, Ypres, and Bruges. A golden hawk was the prize of the tournament, to be presented to the victor by the hand of fair lady.

And who would not deem that, in times so remote, nobles, and nobles only, were the actors in a scene of so much grandeur and beauty? But it was not so: the fête was conducted by burghers; burghers, and burghers *only*, arranged and furnished all; their activity

independence, and energy of spirit raised these Flemish citizens, merchants and traders as they were, to a level (so to say) with the proudest knights who graced the chivalry of England or of France.

We shall not here recount the gallant deeds of arms performed by the good burghers of Lille in these their courtly lists, wherein, sooth to say, coolness and dexterity were needed more than strength or warlike bravery; for they who originated this noble pageant meant to furnish a generous and a manly pastime, not a sanguinary fray. The Festival of the Thorn, which drew such multitudes to Lille, was instituted in the year 1220, in the reign of Philip Augustus, by John of Constantinople, a monarch whose name is still dear to the citizens of that place. Every year the magistrates chose a "king" to preside at the jousts, banquets, and fêtes by which his reign was signalised. This king was to be a burgher of honest family, and at the same time a man of a fair name and goodly substance. His duties were onerous: he must possess such a liberal spirit as would conciliate all parties, and a purse adequate to provide entertainments for his fellow-citizens with becoming dignity and splendour. With these public festivities religious practices were always united. Immediately after his election, the king proceeded with his subjects to the Dominican convent to venerate a precious relic, a thorn out of our Saviour's crown; which done, they repaired to the church of Templemars to pay their devotions to St. George the Martyr, whom the Flemings have ever held in special honour, and at whose altar, as the patron of Christian chivalry, the victor in the jousts hung up his armour.

The king chosen in the year 1441, in the reign of the great Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, possessed all the qualifications of character and fortune required for the exercise of the functions of his mimic royalty. His name was John de la Cambe; but he was *commonly* called John de Ghent, after his native place. *He was of a cheerful* cordial disposition, frank and

courteous to all, and one who discharged the duties of his office with vivacity and ardour. After the tournament, in which he had generously yielded the prize of victory to an opponent from the town of Valenciennes, he repaired with his brilliant train to the monastery of the Friars-Preachers. The Thorn, which had been presented to the religious by the Countess Jane, was placed high above the altar in a magnificent reliquary amidst a thousand burning tapers: the king threw himself on his knees before it, and immediately an extraordinary change was observed to pass over his countenance; the brightness and animation which had flushed and lighted up his features were succeeded by an expression of the most profound devotion; all remembrance, all consciousness of the stirring scene from which he had just come, and with all the pomp and circumstance of which he was still surrounded, seemed in an instant to have gone from him; so intense, so marvellous was his deadness to all outward things, that it looked less like an abstraction than a rapture. And so indeed it was: he saw not the jewels or the lights; his soul was wholly filled with the contemplation of Him whose brow that thorn had lacerated; it was as if he beheld the Precious Blood oozing from each puncture, and covering that Sacred Countenance with its coagulated stream, while an inward voice seemed to say, "*Inglorius erit inter viros aspectus ejus, et forma ejus inter filios hominum.* His visage shall be inglorious among men, and His form among the sons of men."

His companions were astonished at the length of his devotions, and his esquire Pierron grew impatient, and could scarcely restrain the chafing steed, who stood prancing and pawing the ground at the door of the church. It was long before John de la Cambe re-appeared. The trumpets rang, and the gay cavalcade went glittering through the streets amidst the acclamations of the people; but a far different sight was before his eyes, and far different cries resounded in his ears: he saw One sitting crowned with thorns amidst jibes

and cruel mockings, and He hid not His face from shame and spitting.

II.

THE FAMINE.

Twenty years have rolled away since the splendid pageant we have just described. As then, John de la Cambe is a citizen of Lille; as then, he is rich and highly-esteemed: no change is visible in his worldly condition, but a complete transformation has taken place in his individual life. Detached from the world and its illusions, and emptied of the love of creatures, his heart is filled with a boundless love of God and his brethren; and every day that burning charity is exercised in most admirable acts of faith, mercy, and devotion. Not content with magnificently adorning the churches of the town, and promoting the general good by numerous pious foundations, he is the father of the poor, the nurse of the suffering; the tenderness which saints have lavished on those dearest children of Christ's family had its counterpart in him. Widows, orphans, the sick, the friendless, found their way to that mansion at whose threshold they were sure to meet with a ready welcome, and whose very lacqueys, obedient to their master's will, received them with kind and even respectful sympathy. It was, above all, during a grievous famine, which desolated Flanders in the year 1461, that John de la Cambe exhibited that profuseness of charity which made his house the refuge of the destitute. God, who is love, ofttimes kindles in the breasts of His elect a spark of His own ineffable compassion, as if to comfort the poor and needy with a visible token of His most merciful providence. Blessed is he who opens his heart to this grace; blessed is he who watches over the wants of the afflicted! "The Lord shall deliver him *in the evil day;* the Lord shall make all his bed in his *sickness.*"

The famine had long prevailed, and the distress of the people increased from day to day; so numerous were the unhappy creatures who continually besieged the doors of this good citizen of Lille, that his resources, large as they were, were at length exhausted. His granaries were empty; all the corn they contained had been cast with unsparing hand into the lap of the poor; and still fresh suppliants came, still gaunt forms, with famished faces, looked to him, and clamoured too, for aid, and lean and wasted hands knocked at that gate which ever opened at the touch or cry of the distressed. John gave the wretched people the last victuals in his larder, the last coin in his purse, and none who asked in the name of Jesus Christ went away empty. The domestics loudly murmured; Pierron, his old esquire, above all: "Our master," said he, "will leave us nothing but an empty bag and a platter." But his grumblings did not disturb the unalterable sweetness and untiring charity of the once King of the Thorn. One day, a poor woman came to the door all in tears, pale and feeble, begging, for the love of God, but one handful of corn. It was Pierron himself who went to the gate, and history says that he did not receive her very kindly. However, he informed his master what she wanted. John was touched with compassion, and he said to Pierron with much emotion, "Go to the granary, my son, sweep the floor, if need be, and let this poor creature have all you can collect."

At these words Pierron could no longer contain himself: "Did his master not know that the granary was empty? that the floor had been swept perfectly clean long, long ago?" John was not the least shaken; he gently insisted, and Pierron was obliged to obey. He went grumbling and growling up the granary-steps. To his surprise, when he pushed at the door, he found some extraordinary resistance, but by an effort he forced it open; the next moment he had fallen on his knees at the threshold. The granary he had left empty was as full of wheat as it could hold; the precious golden grain

lay heaped up as high as the rafters of the roof, and streamed out through the now open door. It was manna from heaven, which the Lord had sent down for His poor at the prayer of His servant; for God doeth the will of them that fear Him, the God of Israel is good unto all that call upon Him!

Pierron rushed down the steps, and with a sample of the miraculous corn in his hand, threw himself, weeping and repentant, at the feet of his master. The prodigy was soon noised through the town; and John had the consolation, on this day of blessing, of filling the multitudes who came to beg a share in the bounty of heaven, and nevertheless retaining wherewith to satisfy the largeness of his charity on future occasions.

But charity so heroic was desirous of extending its mercies to generations still to come. John de la Cambe founded at Lille a hospital for the reception of thirteen old people, men and women, the poorest and most infirm that could be found, and committed them to the care of eight religious of the Augustinian rule. He placed this foundation under the patronage of St. John Baptist, and amply endowed it by the gift of the house he inhabited in the street *des Malades*, as well as of a considerable extent of land situated, for the most part, in Belgium, on the confines of Holland.

This pious and charitable foundation has survived the ravages of war and the storms of revolution. The house of John de la Cambe still exists; the walls which beheld his numerous works of mercy, which witnessed that most touching miracle which God granted to His servant's prayers, are still standing. They have not ceased to serve as an asylum for the destitute and infirm; the nuns of St. Augustine have never ceased for four centuries to nurse and tend the poor of Christ beneath those hospitable roofs. The old town of Lille, once the favourite abode of Counts of Flanders and Dukes of Burgundy, has changed its aspect a thousand times, under the divers rulers who have held it in possession; *that one little* plot of ground alone, consecrated

to God and to His poor, has retained its original destination and its traditionary renown;—token of the immortality which God has bestowed, even in this world, on works of charity.

The subject of the above legend was thrice married. He was a master-tradesman, and dealt in marble and alabaster. The miraculous supply of corn is attested by the historian Buzelin in his *Annals of French Flanders*, b. ix., and by an unbroken tradition. The granary, which was the scene of so astonishing an interposition of Providence, is still extant, and bears the name of the "Granary of the Miracle." It now forms part of the dormitory of the pensioners; and in a silver reliquary are still preserved some grains of the wheat so miraculously multiplied. The hospital has for some time been used as an asylum for persons of broken fortune, and for this purpose several new foundations have been added. At present only women are received, and of these the number is considerable. There, to this day, may be seen the fair and spacious dormitories, the ancient hall, adorned with carvings of rich and quaint design, serving now for work-chamber and common sitting-room, and the refectory of the nuns, hung with paintings of rare value. The portrait of the founder is preserved with much respect. This picture, which has no artist's name upon it, is painted on a diptych, or folding tablet, and is after the style of the old Flemish school, which was remarkable for its minute elaboration of details and accuracy of execution. The St. John Baptist represented on the left wing appears to be of a more recent date, and may perhaps have taken the place of the founder's wife. The arms of John de la Cambe are emblazoned on the back.

XV.

THE CARPENTER OF ROOSENDAEL.

A.D. 1663.

VILVORDE is a dull inanimate town, with nothing about it to attract or to gratify the curiosity of the tourist, unless it be its large and gloomy gaol, formerly used as a place of confinement for state-prisoners, and at a still earlier date a feudal stronghold, in which resided, among other notable persons, the famous Jacqueline of Bavaria. And yet there is that to be seen in this ancient cradle of the municipal freedom of Brabant which is not unworthy of the attention of the artist; although we may safely say that not one traveller in a hundred has taken the trouble to examine it.

If you are one who care for those elaborate carvings, rich in fantastic details, breathing the very spirit of creative genius, and combining in marvellous variety the beautiful and the grotesque—the product of the *renaissance* period, and more particularly of the seventeenth century,—enter the great church of Vilvorde, pass into the choir, and look around you. The walls on either side are covered with a perfect forest of tracery, most delicately and ingeniously wrought, and forming an umbrageous canopy over the stalls. To describe to you all that glides and climbs, floats and falls, curls and twines itself amidst that inextricable yet most harmonious confusion, would be impossible. At the first glance you perceive only the general effect,—a cornice supported by twisted pillars, which separate a number of niches filled with the images of the twelve Apostles, six on each side; designs illustrative of their respective *martyrdoms form* the finishing above. In front of the

pillars are imaginative figures, bearing the several instruments of our Saviour's Passion, fourteen in all. Such is the result of a general survey. But now come nearer and examine each compartment attentively; you will find a million details more intricate and minute than you could have conceived.

The pillars are especially deserving of admiration; little figures, some inches high, of animals and fruits, the inventions of the wildest and most exuberant fancy, are wreathed and blended together, seeming now to touch, now to recoil from one another, with a wonderful regard both to perspective and to artistic beauty. Then, in the spaces between the pillars, strange, hideous faces seem to stare out at you, each with its own peculiar expression: heads of griffins, satyrs, monsters of every kind, ornament the wood-work of the stalls; flowers, foliage, and fruits cluster carelessly between the frieze and the acanthus-leaves of the capital;—all seems alive in this beautiful composition, the minute details of which combine and harmonise together so felicitously as to convince the beholder that the whole is the result of one vivid original conception. Around the ninth pillar is grouped every thing relating to the chase: at its base are wild boars' heads, stags' antlers, bows, and hunting-horns; in the centre, greyhounds, deer, and huntsmen; at the summit, the traditional stag of St. Hubert, with the crucifix on his forehead. Upon another pillar, and immediately opposite, the artist, whether to indulge a freak of fancy, or wishing to embody some mystical allegory, the meaning of which it is not easy to divine, has introduced two angels, struggling, like the unhappy Laocoon, in the folds of an enormous serpent. Two exquisitely carved panels represent incidents in the Passion of Jesus. In fine, a little angel, with his face turned towards the body of the church, bears in his hand a medallion on which is written "*Anno* 1663."

These carvings, less generally admired perhaps than those of St. Gertrude at Louvain, our Lady at Bruges,

or the Augustinian convent at Ghent, are nevertheless, in many respects, quite as remarkable. The finish, the variety, the delicacy of execution, the richness and quaintness of design, the extraordinary intermingling of natural and monstrous shapes, render these oak-panellings of the church of Vilvorde worthy of all attention. It must be allowed, however, that the images and larger figures are generally wanting in gracefulness and ease; the position of the head and limbs is stiff, sometimes forced and impossible, always constrained. The artist excelled in details; although he lived in the seventeenth century, he evidently belonged to that patient painstaking race which illuminated the ancient manuscripts so marvellously with rich arabesques and borders, but was not as successful in delineating the human countenance.

After speaking of the work, it is only natural and just that we should say something of the workman. The artist who executed this elaborate composition out of some half-dozen planks of solid oak is not one whose name has been handed down like those of Michael Angelo, John Goujon, or Van Huysuns. Popular tradition has barely preserved a lingering recollection of him; for artists did not then inscribe their names on their productions, whatever might be their merit, as at the present day. The finest statues, the most valuable paintings, of former ages have scarcely a monogram to indicate their author. The carvings of Vilvorde bear no artist's name. Tradition simply says that they are the work of the "Carpenter of Roosendael;" and it is thus the legend runs:

Roosendael, up to the time of the French revolution, was a spacious convent situated in the village of Waelhem, near Mechlin, and devoted to the especial care of the sick. The religious received all who sought their hospitality, no matter who they were or whence they came, with that tender compassion which still characterises the order of the "Black Sisters;" the *aged and infirm*, chance travellers, and sick people of

every kind, were there treated with that affectionate solicitude which Christian charity so well knows how to bestow. One evening there came to the convent-gate a poor wayfaring man, suffering from a violent fever; he seemed to have travelled far that day, and to be too weak and exhausted to continue his journey; indeed, he was so ill as hardly to be able to speak. The good nuns received him most kindly, and begged him to stay overnight. The next morning his illness had assumed an alarming character; and for six long weeks he remained hovering between life and death. The strength of his constitution, and the unremitting attentions of the good religious, however, at last triumphed over the disease; and after having been within a hair's breadth of the grave, the stranger began insensibly to recover.

Now the nuns of Roosendael had long been laying by their savings in order to be able to decorate their fine church in a manner worthy of it. The amount was already considerable, and there appeared every prospect of their being speedily in a position to engage some competent artist from Brussels or Antwerp to undertake the work, when, most unfortunately, one night thieves broke into the convent and carried off all the money they had collected with so much trouble. Great was the despair of the superioress and the nuns,—if they can be said to despair who put all their trust in the providence of God; the hope they had cherished for so long, and which seemed so near its accomplishment, was gone, and the realisation of their fondest wishes appeared now to be deferred to an indefinite period.

The stranger, in common with all the other pensioners of their bounty, heard of the disaster, and begged to see the superioress. "Reverend mother," he said, as he approached the old and venerable nun who was at the head of the establishment, "I have learnt that you are in great trouble about your intended decorations for the church, in consequence of the money

you had laid by being stolen last night. You need not despair, however."

"What! do you know any way?"

"Yes, and a very simple one; I can manage to get all you desire done without expense."

"Without expense! surely you are but jesting. What artist is there who would undertake so great a work without payment?"

"Myself, reverend mother."

"You?" answered the religious, smiling; for she began to think that his illness had affected the stranger's brain.

"Yes, I; perhaps there is something of presumption in my proposal, but I have been long meditating how I could prove my gratitude to you for all the kindness and attention you have shown me; to-day an opportunity occurs, and I wish to profit by it."

"But, my friend, who and what are you, that you should think of such a thing?"

"I am but an insignificant individual, reverend mother, a poor journeyman carpenter, who have been living with a master-carver at Cologne to learn my business. I was three years in that city, and was returning on foot to Antwerp, my native place, in the hopes of finding work there, when I was taken ill, and should have died on the way but for the hospitable reception you gave me. I am not altogether without my notions of art; and if you would intrust me with the work, I believe you would have no cause to repent of your confidence."

The stranger spoke with such a tone of profound conviction, and the gratitude he felt was so evident and touching, that the superioress was much moved, as well as favourably impressed.

"But what conditions do you annex to your proposal?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"Five years to complete my undertaking," he replied without hesitation; "a sum of thirty crowns to purchase the necessary tools, and a shed where I can

labour by myself; with the understanding, moreover, that no one shall inspect my handiwork until it is finished. As for salary, all I ask is, that you should feed and clothe me during the time."

The superioress consulted the community on the subject of this strange proposal. The stranger's conduct during his stay in the convent had been such as to inspire confidence in him, and his offer was accepted without a single opposing voice. A few days afterwards, being now perfectly restored to health, he might be heard cutting and sawing, planing and carving plank after plank of solid oak in the interior of a little detached out-house, the keys of which were intrusted to himself alone.

This was in the spring of the year 1658. Five years afterwards, on the 1st of March 1663, the anniversary of the day on which he had first entered the monastery of Roosendael, the stranger donned his holiday suit, and with the radiant air of an artist who is satisfied with his performance, he sought out the superioress, and invited her, together with the whole community, to come and inspect the carvings, to which he had put the finishing stroke that very morning.

The reverend mother, thus invited, proceeded, accompanied by all her nuns, to the workshop of the artist. At the sight of that magnificent piece of carved work, so elaborately wrought, so profusely ornamented, and executed with so much delicacy and skill, there was one universal outburst of praise and admiration on the part of the good sisters. Never had they beheld any thing so perfect: the success of the artist so far surpassed all their hopes, that they regarded him with a respect only equalled by their astonishment. For himself, he stood apart, in a corner of the shed, enjoying in silence that intense satisfaction which is ever the reward of real merit.

"Most nobly have you responded to the confidence we reposed in you!" exclaimed the superioress, wishing to give the artist a public testimony of her approbation.

"These beautiful carvings, destined for our little church, would be well worthy of a cathedral; you are indeed a great artist. We accept your work with lively gratitude; but you must allow us to make you some acknowledgment in return; we will settle upon you a sum of twenty livres, to be paid you, on this day, every year as long as you live."

"Oh! reverend mother, such recompense far exceeds my deserts."

"No, my friend, it is no more than you merit. You are industrious and you are virtuous; God will protect you in every thing you undertake; and we will never cease our prayers that all the graces and blessings of heaven may be yours."

Eight days after, the erection of the stalls was inaugurated with all solemnity in the church of Roosendael, and the same day the unknown artist disappeared from the convent, and, as the legend says, was never heard of more.

At the French revolution, the convent of Roosendael was suppressed, and every thing belonging to it was sold and dispersed. The parish of Vilvorde had the good fortune to purchase the magnificent carved-work, which forms at this day the most striking ornament of its noble church.



XVI.

THE WIDOW OF ARTOIS.

A.D. 1173.

IN the latter part of the twelfth century there lived in the small town of St. Pol, in Artois, a poor widow who feared God and reverenced His saints. Her only joy in life was her infant son, and she had nothing to depend upon for their common support but the labour of her hands and the charity of pious souls; but she placed all her confidence in Him who has bid us not be solicitous for the morrow, and look to Him for our daily bread.

One evening a poor friar, who had lost his way, knocked at the door of her humble abode, and begged for a little food and a night's shelter. Like the widow of Sareptha, she never refused to give out of her deep poverty to those who were in need, and she willingly accorded to the stranger the hospitality he craved. He gave only the name of Christian; but the words that fell from his lips had in them a wonderful mixture of sweetness and command. In the morning, as he was about to take the road towards France, he said, in the words of St. Peter to the lame man sitting at the gate of the Temple, "Silver and gold have I none; but that which I have give I thee," and raising his hand, he bestowed his benediction on the good widow and the child she bore in her arms, with an air of so much majesty, that she felt as if his blessing had something of supernatural virtue in it. And, in fact, this poor unknown friar, clad in a habit of coarsest serge, to whom she had given a night's lodging, was no other than the famous Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury and Pri-

mate of England, who, like his Divine Master, was suffering persecution for justice' sake. Compelled to fly his country in disguise to avoid the tyrannic violence of Henry II., he was on his way to seek an asylum at the court of Louis, King of France. The presence of such a man in her humble cabin left behind it a perfume of edification in the heart of the pious widow, the effect of which was increased tenfold when she became aware who it was whom she had entertained unawares. Nor was it long ere the tidings with which all Christendom rang reached her lonely cottage, that the crime of a worthless monarch had obtained for the venerable prelate the crown of martyrdom; and as every day in her prayers she testified her belief in the communion of saints, and that death has no power to break the ties by which Christians are bound together in this life, she never ceased to have a lively faith in the protection of her saintly guest. Devout as she was before, she now redoubled her fervour; and took all diligent pains to bring up her child, from his earliest years, in obedience to the commandments of God and the Church.

The year of our Lord 1173 was a year of dearth and famine; a rigorous winter had now come to add its own peculiar sufferings to the privations of the time, and the general need closed hands and hearts against the poor.

The widow sought for work or alms in vain; she had exhausted her last means for her child's support, having stripped herself of her very clothes, and deprived herself of food to obtain some scanty sustenance for him; but soon her strength gave way in the extremity of her distress, her energies of mind and body alike failed her. She fell sick; and from the wretched pallet where she lay helplessly extended, she had the agony of hearing her child saying continually by her side, "Oh, mother, I am so cold and hungry; I want some bread."

"Bread, my poor child? It is all gone, and I *cannot go and seek* for any; but the Lord never for-

sakes those who serve Him in sincerity of heart. Pray to Him; then go out into the highway, and beg of the rich as they pass by; hold out your hand and say, 'Give me something for the love of God!' They will be sure to give to you; for your voice is sweet and gentle—not like mine." The anxious mother thought that the penny which would be denied to her poverty and importunity would be granted to her child's plaintive accents and tender years.

The little fellow went out as his mother had bidden him; but, spared as he had hitherto been by her exertions the necessity of imploring the compassion of strangers, he was ashamed to beg. Far from trying to attract the attention of the passers-by, he hardly liked to let them see his misery, and went wandering about, murmuring mechanically a few broken words which nobody could hear; so that several went on their way without so much as observing him. At last he reached the porch of the great church; an old canon was just coming out; and encouraged by his mild and benevolent countenance, the child was on the point of approaching him and imploring his charity. But the old priest was hastening to a dying man; he walked quickly on, and did not perceive the little boy following him. While endeavouring to overtake him, the child met a cavalier, covered with velvet and ermine, mounted on a beautiful palfrey, with a damsel, richly attired, seated behind him. They were on their way to a banquet given by the Sire de Bryas, and doubtless would have gladly thrown a handful of coin to the young petitioner, to begin the pleasures of the day by a work of charity; but the howling of the wind and the noise of their horse's feet drowned the tremulous voice which ventured to accost them, and they left behind them the poor little beggar-boy to his sorrow and his hunger.

Thus abandoned by all, his eyes red and swollen with tears which he strove in vain to repress, he suddenly remembered that his mother had often made him pray God to bless the noble lady, the Countess de

St. Pol; and how he had heard people say she was gracious and gentle to all her vassals, high and low, and kindest to those to whom God had dealt the smallest share of this world's goods. At this cheering thought, his strength and courage revived, and he ascended the steep path that led to the castle; but on arriving, he found to his dismay that the drawbridge was up, and on the other side he could see a man-at-arms standing, whose stern aspect and martial appearance frightened him. He stopped, however, and from time to time cast supplicating glances towards him, in the hopes of moving him to pity; but the man took no notice of him, and the child felt his last hope die in his heart. To shelter himself from the piercing blast, he crept into the thicket which skirted the side of the moat, and went and sat behind a pile of faggots newly raised by the woodmen. There he remained sobbing and crying; but after a little while a benumbing chill seized on his little limbs; he fell into a drowsy stupor; the pitiless cold completed what want and misery and fatigue had begun. Soon he ceased to cry, he ceased to suffer: he was dead.

Meanwhile the mother, left all alone, had counted the long dreary hours as they went by, looking in vain for her darling's return. Every time the wind shook the door, she thought it was her boy coming in, and with difficulty raised herself up in her bed to catch a sight of him; but the wind was quiet again, every thing was still, and she sank back exhausted with pain and anxiety. More than once, in spite of her illness and weakness, she dragged herself to the door of the cabin, to listen in the distance, and call him by his name; but there came no reply to relieve and gladden her heart. At last, no longer able to control her fears, and love lending strength to her enfeebled frame, she left the house, and went out into the highway; and now she, in her turn, wandered about the neighbourhood, asking every one she met, not for bread, but for her child. Her *distress touched the* hearts of those she accosted; but no

one could tell her what had become of him, he had passed along so quick and unnoticed. In an agony of tears, and, like Rachel, refusing to be comforted, she wandered thus the whole day long, and all night too, without finding any traces of him whom she was seeking. At last, on the third day, she went into the chapel of Tourelles, and throwing herself on her knees before the image of Our Lady of Dolours, she implored her by her three days' sorrowing at the loss of Jesus, and her joy at finding Him in the Temple, to give her back her child, dead or alive. The tender heart of Mary had compassion on her; and the unhappy mother, as though guided by an invisible hand, went straight to the place where her child was lying. Her eye had no sooner lighted upon him, than she rushed forward, cast herself on the ground, and clasped him to her breast, amidst a shower of tears and kisses; but when she found him hang motionless in her arms, and felt his stiff and icy cheeks against her own, she fell fainting by his side.

But God, who has pity on a mother's sorrow, and who once raised to life again the only son of the widow of Naim, willed to show forth His mercy in this poor mother, and to glorify through her one of His blessed saints. Her first thought, as she came to herself, was of that holy pastor who had shed his blood for the Church of Christ. She had taught her boy from his earliest years to invoke the great St. Thomas, and to regard him with a loving veneration as his most especial patron; on the very last feast of Whitsuntide she had taken him to the Abbey of Dommartin, on the confines of Picardy, where the relics of the saint were kept; and now, without rising from her knees, she thus piteously besought his aid: "O holy martyr!" she cried, "my child is dead—the child whom once you blessed when he lay an infant on my bosom. Have you forgotten the honour you then did me in visiting my humble dwelling? have you forgotten the pilgrimage we made you in return? and will you not assist us in our need? For myself, I know that my sins have rendered

unworthy of your notice; but this poor child, as yet so innocent, have pity on him!"

The gates of heaven opened at the widow's prayer, and from his throne in glory the saint completed those words of the apostle, which years before he had begun to utter: "In the name of Jesus rise up and walk." The boy instantly revived; and with life to her child, joy once again returned to the mother's heart.

In the following year, the subject of the miracle, to manifest his gratitude for the mercy he had received, collected together five hundred children, and went with them to the monastery of Dommartin to behold and venerate the relics of the holy martyr.



XVII.

THE VILLAGE OF BLANKENBERG.

ADOLPHE DE LA MARCK, Prince-bishop of Liège, had reigned nearly twenty years over his factious and unruly subjects, when he determined on selling the town of Mechlin, the lordship of which belonged to the bishopric of Liège, although it was really under the dominion of powerful patrons, the family of Berthold, who on more than one occasion had successfully resisted the dukes and counts their neighbours. Louis de Nevers, Count of Flanders, had already, with the consent of Adolphe de la Marck, purchased all the rights and titles of the patrons of Mechlin from the heir of the last of the Bertholds; and, on the 3d of December 1335, the town became his property and domain, with the single reservation that it should remain a fief of the church of Liège, and continue to pay it feudal homage.

When the treaty was concluded, it created great dissatisfaction in the breasts of the townspeople; they had a violent antipathy against Louis de Nevers, which broke out in expressions of open disaffection. They sent a deputation to the people of Liège, who, in their turn, held tumultuous assemblages, in which resolutions were passed strongly condemnatory of the conduct of the prince. The feelings of the multitude once excited, discontent soon showed itself in angry murmurs, to be speedily followed by actual insurrection. John III., duke of Brabant, who, as a near neighbour of Mechlin, was at hand to seize any opportunity which might

favour his own designs upon the town, encouraged the revolt: there was fighting in the streets of Mechlin, and still more serious conflicts in the streets of Liège, and blood flowed freely on both sides.

Adolphe de la Marck had found that the government and patronage of the town were productive of more trouble than profit; he felt, also, that as the agreement was signed, he could not in honour recede from it, but, on the contrary, was bound to use every means to carry it into effect. He accordingly desired his officers to speak to the people; but their representations had not the slightest effect. In the heat of the tumult the venerable Count de Hermal, a nobleman of high integrity, who supported the cause of the prelate, was grossly insulted by the Count de Looz, who had put himself at the head of the insurgents. Hermal was endeavouring, by conciliatory language, to pacify the malcontents, and had mounted the flight of steps which served the agitators of Liège as a rostrum, when the Count de Looz violently seized him and dragged him down, accompanying the outrage with an opprobrious epithet, which the old man's spirit could not brook. Both, at the same instant, drew their daggers in the midst of the crowd, and closed in mortal combat; and although youth and strength gave Looz the advantage, yet Hermal triumphed, and in a few seconds his antagonist lay stretched dead at his feet. Then one wild yell of fury burst from the multitude, they raised aloft the dead body of their leader, crying loudly for vengeance, while the bishop's guards, hastily surrounding Hermal, profited by the confusion to bear him away to a place of safety. And well it was that they were so rapid in their movements; for the populace, after their first outbreak of passionate indignation, looked round for him whom they styled the assassin, although in fact his adversary, and not himself, was the aggressor; but the object of their resentment had disappeared, as if by *magic.* Their rage now turned to frenzy, and seizing *the body of the Count,* they paraded it through the

streets, and rushed tumultuously to the palace of the prince-bishop, where the burgomasters of Liège assured their lord that the people were ready to rise in arms, unless the murder of their champion were speedily avenged.

Weary of strife and contention, Adolphe de la Marck readily promised that inquiry should be made into the crime, and full justice be done; and for the moment peace was restored. But when, after a few days, the murderer was not forthcoming, the agitation, which, moreover, was fomented by the burghers of Mechlin and the agents of the Duke of Brabant, commenced anew and lasted into the following year, when a circumstance occurred which quieted men's minds, at least as far as concerned the death of the Count de Looz. A traveller arrived at Liège who had become acquainted with the retreat of the Sire de Hermal.

The old count, rescued, as we have seen, by the guards of the prince-bishop, had found means to escape from the city in the shades of the evening without being recognised. He hurried on, recommending himself to God, and thankful for every step that placed a greater distance between himself and the city of Liège; for he well knew the perils that menaced him for having provoked the wrath of its headstrong populace. For a whole week he pursued his way, directing his course towards the sea-coast, where he hoped to meet with a vessel that would convey him to England. He thus accomplished nearly fifty leagues: not daring to enter Bruges, a town which had much commercial intercourse with Liège, he retired to a little hamlet three leagues distant from that fair city, and four from the town of Ostend. This hamlet had been, in ancient times, a Roman station, and was now known by the name of Schaerfout. Two classes of people, widely separated from each other, formed its only inhabitants: rich burghers of Bruges, whose gay country-houses stood upon the sea-shore,—and poor fishermen, lodged in humble cabins, who every day braved the storms

northern sea, to supply the luxury of the opulent city. The wide-spread commerce of the Flemings had poured into the country not plenty only, but superfluity; the silks, the velvets, and the gold, which were so profusely lavished on their attire, made their towns appear like so many royal courts. A queen, who visited Ghent at this time, when she beheld the superb dresses of the ladies, exclaimed: "I thought I was the only princess here, but I find I am but one among a thousand." The vices which followed in the train of this prodigality of wealth kept pace with the luxury from which they sprung. Great license prevailed, and license produced a frightful brood of crime: not a week passed without some deed of blood; not a street, not a village, but had its den of infamy.

The little hamlet of Schaerfout was a very Nineveh for wickedness: the country-houses of the rich citizens were so many temples of riot and debauchery. The fishermen, who felt that their livelihood depended on the good-will of the dissolute young men of the neighbourhood, scrupled not to pander to the vicious pleasures of their employers. One individual alone in the whole place, a poor man named Elias Blankenberg, had the courage to profess himself a Christian, and fulfilled the duties of his state with exemplary regularity. He maintained himself and his wife, as pious as himself, on the profits of his fishing, and every Sunday that came saw them praying fervently, but with aching hearts, in the almost deserted church of Schaerfout: their only child, Gertrude, once their hope and their pride, had abandoned herself to a career of guilt and shame. One friend they had, a man of the world, yet of blameless life, who occasionally condoled with them, as they returned together from church; this was the Sire de Tronchiennes, who came every month to the village to visit an old relative.

It was to the house of the good Blankenberg that *the* Count de Hermal came and begged for shelter, *until he could make* his escape to England. It was late

in the evening when he reached the cabin on the coast, and found the fisherman and his wife lamenting together over the loss of their beloved child; but they hastily dried their tears, and welcomed the stranger who sought their hospitality with so much genuine cordiality, that the old man's heart was cheered, and he blessed the Providence which had guided him to such a place of refuge; the more so when he found that he was at Schaerfout, a village of such scandalous notoriety. But it was the middle of winter, and the weather so stormy that no vessel made its appearance; and the count was forced to wait on with patience. However, he was a Christian in deed, as well as in name, and he failed not every Sunday to accompany the fisherman and his wife to the parish-church, where his piety and recollection were noticed by all. He thought himself safe from recognition; but he was unfortunately observed by a tradesman of Aix-la-Chapelle, who, passing through Liège shortly after, mentioned, probably without any ill intention, that he had seen the count.

However this may be, so it was that, one Sunday in the March of 1334, while the aged pastor of Schaerfout was declaiming from the pulpit against the fearful vices of the time, and bewailing above all the disorders of his own guilty village—at the very moment that, with the air of an inspired prophet, he was declaring that the mercy of the Most High was at length exhausted, and that the terrors of His judgments were about to descend upon the earth, eight deputies from Liège entered the church, and Hermal no sooner left the building than he was arrested. The quiet churchyard was soon a scene of the utmost confusion; crowds, who on ordinary occasions never entered the sacred precincts, were attracted by the tumult; the heads of the village assembled, before whom the deputies denounced the stranger as the murderer of the Count de Looz, and Hermal was called upon for his defence. The old man's heart failed him; for he knew that the inhabitants of the place were

friends of the people of Liège; nevertheless, strong in a consciousness of his innocence, he betrayed no sign of alarm, but calmly detailed all the circumstances of the untoward event. The deputies, in their turn, inflamed with fury against him, contradicted his assertions, and gave another and a darker version of the story; and the inhabitants determined on delivering him up. The doors of the church were immediately closed, to prevent his taking sanctuary.

However, Hermal had his friends, and among them was the Sire de Tronchiennes, who happened to be on the spot; he seems to have been a man of about forty years of age, and a person of considerable influence. He warmly embraced the cause of the Count, and while deliberations were going on as to the measures to be taken for giving him up to his enemies, saving the privileges of the town, he led him back to Blankenberg's dwelling, and urged him to put to sea at once, without a moment's delay, were it only in the good man's fishing-boat. Preparations were being made, and the boat about to be launched, when the crowd besieged the hut, and called upon Elias to deliver up his guest; but the fisherman planted himself before his door and boldly refused to comply with their demand.

Meanwhile it was no longer possible to venture out to sea; for, as if the old priest's denunciations were to receive an instant fulfilment, he had scarcely done speaking when a sudden and violent tempest arose. The waves, dashing furiously over the beach, rushed like a torrent upon the crowds, who were now endeavouring to force an entrance into the fisherman's hut. Panic-stricken, they betook themselves to flight; and the good man smiled as he beheld his humble dwelling threatened by the mighty waters and in a moment appearing like an islet in the midst of the deep. The Count de Hermal reconnoitred his enemies through a loophole in the wall, and perceived that the whole population had sided with the men from Liège, and were *only waiting for the* subsiding of the waters to seize

upon his person. But, so far from retiring, the waves continued to rise higher and higher, with a roar like that of thunder; while the terrible north wind, increasing every moment in fury, shook the frail tenements to their foundations, and uprooted the strongest trees. Blankenberg alone felt no fear: he remained calmly in his cabin, with his wife, his guest, and the Sire de Tronchiennes; his daughter too was at his side: she had fled back to her forsaken home, half-dead with fright, yet, alas! impenitent as ever.

So rapidly did the waves advance, that every fresh breaker which burst upon the shore drove Hermal's enemies further and further inland. Soon even they were seized with terror, as, casting their eyes around them, they perceived that the flood had closed them in on every side; the very land seemed slipping down into the waves, and the whole village on the point of being engulfed in the raging element. The wind blew furiously, sweeping every thing before it, and tearing off the roofs of the cottages and houses; the ground heaved under their feet, and it seemed as if the last terrible day were come. The population rushed towards the church, which stood above the level of the rest of the village; the doors were again thrown open, and, fear teaching men the need of prayer, the house of God was filled with sinners, prostrate on their knees and crying to heaven for mercy. But the angry floods rose to the very church-doors, and poured into the building—it seemed as if the mound on which it stood had suddenly sunk down, to second the vengeful fury of the ocean; the crowds, struggling in vain to escape the pursuing waters, pressed madly to the altar, and, in the agony of their despair, called for their priest; but now that they sought him, they found him not.

Night had set in, while the tempest was still raging with unabated fury. Blankenberg was engaged in fervent prayer within his hut, though at every blast of the wind it tottered to its base. At length the little boat, driven by the waves up to the very threshold,

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XVIII.

ST. EDWARD'S DEATH.

CHAPTER I.

THE GIFT AT THE ALTAR.

WE have already presented our readers with the traditionary story of the first consecration of Westminster Abbey, a building whose history is, perhaps, as rich in saintly and supernatural interest as any that could be named. The desolation of the church and monastery in the times of the Danish irruptions, and its subsequent restoration under Edward the Confessor, have been already briefly noticed; and it is of this, its second dedication, that we are now about to speak. The erection of the restored abbey had been originally undertaken by St. Edward, in commutation of the vow by which, when in exile, he had bound himself to make a pilgrimage to Rome, should he ever be put in possession of the crown of his ancestors; it was commenced as early as 1049, and sixteen years elapsed before the building was finally completed.

During that time the progress of the work was often interrupted; but in the autumn of the year 1065 the urgency of the king had caused a rapid advance to be made, and every thing seemed to promise that the new church of St. Peter might be opened and dedicated at no distant day. Edward's eagerness to watch and superintend the completion of the building, and the love

seemed to offer itself as a frail but temporary refuge; and, without a moment's delay, he embarked upon it, with his wife, his daughter, his guest, and the Sire de Tronchiennes. The last had scarcely set his foot on board, when the cabin disappeared beneath the waves. of the village itself not a vestige was to be seen.

During all that fearful night the boat was tossing amid the waste of waters; but as the day broke, the storm abated; the unhappy parents looked in vain for their daughter, so lately restored to them; Gertrude was missing—the furious blast had swept her from the boat, and the waves in an instant had closed over her head. The whole village had been swallowed up, not a habitation remained; the church itself was no longer visible: a hillock of barren sand covered what but yesterday was a thriving town, given up to sinful pleasures and ungodliness. The boat stopped, as though of its own accord, close to the belfry-tower; it alone had survived the universal devastation, and at the same instant the old priest issued from the ruin. Vainly endeavouring to reach his flock, he had been permitted only to save his life.

The fisherman rebuilt his cabin; a new village slowly rose on the site of that which lay buried beneath: it took the name of the good man who alone, amidst the general depravity, had remained faithful to his God, and is now the little village of Blankenberg.

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which he had insensibly acquired for the spot, made holy long since by the mystic presence of the great Apostle, and believed to be still dear and favoured in his eyes, had induced him to take up his own residence in the neighbourhood; so that now, under the very shadow of the stately minster, there rose at a short distance the walls of the royal palace; the two buildings being scarcely a bow-shot from one another. The presence of the court had therefore rendered Westminster a busy place; and on the autumn morning on which our narrative opens, the scene before the palace-gates, if differing widely from that which is now to be witnessed on the same spot, was scarcely less gay and bustling. There was the varied costume of the age, the long-haired Saxons, mingling with the Norman nobles, who crowded the court of Edward, and were already viewed with a certain jealousy and suspicion by the English. For it was said the Normans enjoyed more of the king's favour than his countrymen; that he had himself adopted their dress and their national habits; and that even in the erection of the edifice, which many were now examining with a curious eye, Norman architects and Norman rules of art had been preferred; so that the minster was, as we are told, altogether of a new kind of architecture, evincing an evident departure from the rude and barbarous style which had hitherto prevailed.

"It is a fair sight," said one of a little group of idlers, who sauntered about the open space, awaiting, as it would seem, the opening of the palace-gates; "but methinks that Englishmen could build churches as fair, without the aid of Normans as their masters. I marvel when we shall be rid of them; they crowd about the gates yonder, as though they alone were free to draw near to the person of the king; it looks not well to see the Saxons jostled to the outer rank each time he comes abroad."

"*Hugolin,* the chamberlain, is of Norman blood," re*plied the companion* whom he addressed; "it is he who

gives his countrymen the places on the palace-steps, that they may gain the king's ear when he appears, and win what they will out of his royal heart."

"By my faith, Leofstan," said the first speaker, "were all England of my mind, the palace-steps should soon be cleared of foreigners, and the palace too; and we should hear no more of Norman chamberlains to an English king. England for the English, say I; there are learned heads and stout arms enough in our own island, as I take it, without sending over the sea for our courtiers or our priests."

"Egelnoth," said a low sweet voice behind him, "thou hast uttered a foolish word, and I pray God the day may never come when England shall call it wisdom."

The Saxon turned as he was addressed, and encountered the mild eye of one who wore the habit of a monk, and who, indeed, formed one of the new community of Westminster; his presence at once seemed to impose something of restraint on the language and murmurs of his companions.

"Good father," said Egelnoth, with the air of one a little abashed by the presence of a superior, "I knew not you were within earshot; but I would fain know why you call my prating folly; for of a truth, if the rights of England should be dear to any, they should be so to Aldred the Saxon."

"And they are dear," answered Aldred, "and to none dearer. But I deemed that thy words betokened something of a spirit which England may one day learn to rue. 'England for the English,' saidst thou? Why, hadst thou lived in the days of Ethelbert, I trow thou wouldst have thrust back the very Cross that Augustine bore, because it was brought to thee by a foreign monk. Where, then, would be the glory of our Saxon fathers, who knew of no such limits to Christian love as may be found in the boundaries of lands, or the difference of tongues, but freely gave the blood of their saints and martyrs to evangelise the world? Had there

been the cry of England for the English in the days of Boniface, methinks Germany would have scarce had her apostle from our shores."

"Dost thou, then, condemn the love of country, good father?" said Leofstan, who till now had listened in silence; "and wouldst thou have us tamely endure the taunts of these shaven Normans, who come hither to teach us manners unasked, and to mock at what they term our clownish ways?"

"I fear me," answered the monk, "there is something in Saxon manners which Norman novelties might mend; and some say the Normans are welcome guests with our noble king, the rather that they have not yet unlearnt the temperance which raises man above the brutes. Thou knowest best, my son, at which banquet-boards the angels are likeliest to be guests."

"Why, thy heart is grown Norman, father," interrupted Leofstan reproachfully; "it was not thus thou wast used to speak in the cloisters of Winton when, as a boy, I learnt to love the Saxon saints and heroes from hearing their stories from thy lips."

"Leofstan," replied the monk, "there was, as I think, in the days you speak of, less talk of Norman and of Saxon, and of foreign blood and English rights. England hath been, God knows, an isle of saints, and fitly may her children love their name; but yet a Christian man does well to stretch his heart a little wider than her shores, and to think that all lands where the Cross shines beneath the rule of Peter are knit in a bond of brotherhood. The Church is a mighty mother, and her tongue is one; and, in truth, when the gates of the Eternal Palace open to us, there will be small question of blood or country among those that crowd its steps."

"Well, well, Master Aldred," said Egelnoth, the first speaker, "you talk like a monk, and we as men; it may be, the world is all one land to those who have foresworn all lands alike; but to me, who have not yet *forgotten my* Saxon blood, it is a burning shame to see *a crowd of foreign* foes close about the king, thrusting

from him his own brethren; and, for aught I know, shutting his heart against them."

As he spoke, Egelnoth's eyes again turned towards the palace-gates, and Aldred followed the direction of his glance. A smile passed over the features of the monk, as, after a moment's inspection of the distant group, he said, in a livelier tone, "Mine eyes are surely sharper than thine own, good Egelnoth; it seems to me that neither Saxon nor Norman will this time claim the first word with holy Edward, but one thou wilt scarcely find it in thine heart to envy. Let us draw a little nearer; and if the Normans succeed in pressing their suits the first to-day, I give thee leave to grumble as thou wilt, and to teach them a lesson of Saxon manners, if thou hast a mind."

So saying, he approached the palace, followed by his two companions; and the crowd, which had now considerably increased in numbers, giving way as he advanced, the three soon found themselves close within the circle which had gathered about the gates. Aldred's person, indeed, was known to all; and at his appearance, the whisper which rang among the strangers of "the king's confessor," explained the secret of the respect so universally displayed.

It was the hour when the king was usually accustomed to ride abroad; and whilst an idle curiosity had brought many to the spot, others had come, as was the habit in those days, to present some suit, or ask a favour, from the royal lips; or, it may be, only to pay their court, and remind King Edward, by their presence, of their claims to notice. As Aldred and the two Saxons arrived in the midst of the group which stood closest to the steps leading to the palace, it seemed as if those who had formed the subject of their conversation a few minutes before were occupied with some matter of entertainment, on which they were by turns exercising their wit and ridicule.

"It is a barbarous island, my Roland," said one, who was evidently the exquisite of the party; "but, as

the many strange sights my eyes have rested on, this passeth all; thinkest thou the thing is human?"

"It is a question more learned heads than mine must answer," replied Roland; "and happily," he added, as he perceived the approach of Aldred, "here is one at hand who will solve the riddle; see here, good father, we would crave of your reverence to tell us if it is the custom of your English monarchs to adorn their palace courts with grotesque images, after the manner of the Greeks?"—and as he spoke he drew back a little, and pointed towards a strange and hideous object which occupied the lowest step.

It was that of a human being, so deformed and misshapen by disease, that the Norman might well have been excused for misdoubting of its reality. The muscles of his legs were contracted, so that the soles of his feet adhered to his thighs; and the only manner in which the unhappy creature could move, was by means of a kind of wooden roller, which he grappled with his hands; thus dragging himself with pain and difficulty along the ground.

"It is the Irish cripple," said the monk, in a tone of compassion: "thou hast not yet made pilgrimage to the shrine of Peter, noble count, or thine eye would have learnt a familiarity with such sufferers as these, who crowd about the holy places for relief, and, I doubt not, do much to move the hearts of the faithful with the touch of charity. But why art thou here, Murodac?" he continued; "knowest thou not that the king's nobleness is shortly expected? and thou art indeed but a strange equerry to hold his stirrup."

"Even therefore am I come," answered the cripple, without attempting to move from the position he had taken; "I have a message for the king, and must deliver it to him face to face, nor know I where the beggar Murodac can better hope to meet him than on his own door-step: wherefore, by your leave, good father, *I will abide* where I am, and the noble gentlemen can *make merry* with me as they please."

At that moment the wide door of the entrance-hall was thrown open, and Hugolin, the royal chamberlain, appeared on the steps, to prepare the way for his master's approach. As he did so, the form of the Irish cripple at once arrested his eye. "What foolery is this, Murodac?" he asked, in an angry tone. "It is many a day since thou wert seen at the gate; thou shalt be cared for, man, another time; but now hobble off at thy fastest pace, for the royal retinue is at hand."

"Hugolin, Hugolin," cried the miserable being, in his shrill and unnatural voice, as some of the servants were about to enforce the chamberlain's command with some degree of violence, "hast thou no pity on me? I have crawled many a weary mile to reach this step, and now they are thrusting me away before thine eyes, and the sight moves thee not to compassion."

"Why, what wouldst thou have of me?" asked Hugolin, to whom the cripple was indeed an old friend; "I will listen to thee another day, but now ——"

"But *now* I say," interrupted the other; "*now* is the hour for which I came. I have a message for the king, and have borne it from Rome, being charged to deliver it to him face to face, at his palace-door; and now that I have reached my journey's end, thou wilt surely for once befriend me, and suffer me to do my errand."

There was something so earnest and positive in the beggar's tone, that Hugolin hesitated: beggars were no strange sights in those times at the doors of monarchs, and Edward was known to have a singular tenderness and love towards those poor outcasts, from whom the refinement of modern days is wont to shrink; moreover, it did not seem quite impossible that it was even as he had said, and that some secret of importance might have been committed to this strange ambassador, whose very rags and misery would secure him from suspicion on the way.

As he paused in doubt what course to follow, for tune decided the question in favour of the cripple.

stir was heard in the hall within, and, in another moment, Edward himself was seen descending the steps which had been the scene of the singular dispute. Of the middle height and of admirable figure and proportion, the form of the royal Confessor was full of a kingly dignity that was worthy of his rank and station. But when you glanced at his face, you were struck at once with the contrast between that manly bearing and the expression of childlike and extreme simplicity that shone upon his countenance. The extraordinary fairness of his complexion communicated an almost infantine character to features whose delicate and gentle beauty had nothing to betoken the warrior or the chief of a great and semi-barbarous nation. Standing in the midst of his courtiers, with his fair mild face and tranquil eyes, brightened rather than shadowed with hair and eyebrows "as dazzlingly white," says William of Malmesbury, "as the snow-fair feathers of the swan," he floated before the gaze like an angelic vision; and the feeling rose upon the heart that the possessor of that countenance, which already bore the stamp of beatitude on its singular loveliness, must be all unsuited to the harsh contests of the world around him, and ripe for the glory of heaven. And, indeed, it was whispered that some notification of his coming release had been received by the royal saint not long before, and that his increased earnestness in pressing the completion of St. Peter's church and monastery arose from an anxiety to see the solemn fulfilment of his vow before he died. However that might be, it could not be doubted that for many months there had been a visible change in his conduct and in his appearance. His prayers and alms, at all times so profuse, had been redoubled; whilst something of unearthly sweetness had mingled with the traces of bodily suffering which at times might be observed upon his face.

Such was the exterior of the Confessor, as he stood in the midst of his retinue, and paused to ascertain the *meaning of the* momentary confusion.

"So please you, my liege," began Hugolin, in some vexation at the arrival of his master in the midst of the disorder, "it is the Irish beggar, Murodac, who would fain thrust himself into your sacred presence, under pretext of some message, and will not be kept back until he hath delivered his suit."

"And wherefore should he, or any of my subjects, be kept from me?" said Edward, with a shade of severity in his tone. "Come hither, Murodac, if thou art able, and tell me what thou seekest: when last I saw thee at the gate, they told me thou wert bound for Rome: the touch of the holy chair hath not, as it seems, restored thy limbs."

"Most gracious lord," answered the beggar, who had meanwhile succeeded in dragging himself to the feet of the king, "six times have I, even as thou seest me, visited the seat of the apostles, but have not been worthy to have the soundness of my body restored to me: nevertheless, the prince of the apostles hath not absolutely refused my prayer, he hath but deferred its accomplishment, because he desires that thou, O king, shouldst be his associate in the miracle. Wherefore, with his own lips, he hath commanded me to seek thy presence, in order that thou, bearing me on thy sacred shoulders, mayest carry me from the palace to the church yonder, which thing if thou wilt do, health and strength shall be given to these crippled limbs."

An indignant exclamation burst from the bystanders at the insolent proposal of the beggar, and some advanced to lay hands on him and eject him from the court; but, with a motion of his hand, Edward kept them back. "I give thanks to God," he said, "that He hath not denied me the choicest of His gifts. For thy cure, good Murodac, thou must look to God; nevertheless, the bidding of the apostle shall be surely done."

As he spoke he descended the steps, and, approaching the cripple, he stooped meekly down and raised him on his shoulders. "Then," says his biographer Ailred,

"there might be seen hanging around the person of this illustrious king a wretched sordid beggar, whose squalid arms and loathsome hands embraced his neck, and were clasped together on that truly royal breast! Some of those who were present laughed outright at what they saw; others gibed and mocked, and declared that the king had been cajoled by a beggar-man; whilst others esteemed it but the utter simplicity and extreme folly of virtue." Little regarding their murmurs, however, the king walked on, bending under his burden, in the direction of the abbey-church. He himself was absorbed in prayer; but he had not advanced many steps when Murodac felt a sudden and wonderful change within him. The contracted muscles simultaneously relaxed, the bones knitted together, the diseased and mortified flesh was warmed with health, the feet, that had till then adhered to the thighs, lost their hold, the joints moved freely, and, as he stretched his legs in their recovered freedom, the bystanders perceived that the royal robes were stained with the blood which flowed from his open wounds. At this sight a fresh cry rose from the crowd of spectators; but the king did not heed it, and perhaps it did not even reach his ears.

"Surely enough hath been done," exclaimed Count Roland, whilst a strong expression of disgust passed across his features; "let the king free himself from the miserable creature, now that the will of St. Peter hath been accomplished; his royal robes are scarce the linen to bind a leper's wounds!"

"I doubt not," answered Aldred, to whom the indignant noble had turned whilst he spoke, as if to secure his interference with the king, "I doubt not our noble master will count his dress more richly adorned with yonder leper's blood than if it sparkled with a thousand gems. See, they are even now at the abbey-doors; let us follow, gentlemen, if, indeed, we be not unworthy to behold the glory of God."

Although the church of St. Peter's was not yet *entirely completed* in every part, yet it had been opened

for some time, and the high altar within the choir of the monks had been in daily use during more than a year previously for the celebration of the Divine mysteries. Thither Edward now bent his steps, nor did he pause or relinquish his precious burden till he reached the altar-steps; but, bearing the beggar as though he was a holy holocaust, he laid him down before the altar, and there resigned him to the care of God and of St. Peter. Then, kneeling reverently by his side, with his hands clasped before his breast, he lifted his streaming eyes to the figure of the crucifix, and said: "Many gifts and offerings hast Thou suffered me, O Lord, to lay before Thy feet, but none so dear and precious as that which I offer Thee to-day. Go, Murodac," he added, turning to the cripple, "and if God hath heard thy prayer, through the merits of His apostle, fail not to use the strength he hath restored to thee in making a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to his shrine."

At the words of the holy Confessor, Murodac arose and stood before the multitude erect and without a vestige of deformity or disease upon him; and, as the astonished spectators broke out into praises of God and St. Peter, and the crowd without mingled with their acclamations the name of their saintly monarch, Edward hastily retired, that he might escape from the observation of the people and from the admiration that was painful to his humility.

The scene of this miracle, performed in the eyes of hundreds and attested by many witnesses, is still among us; but it is marked by no monument or wayside cross; it lies in the busy thoroughfare half-way between the Abbey Church of Westminster and the Houses of Parliament; and amid the countless crowds who daily pass, not one, perhaps, has dreamed that, in the eyes of God and of His angels, that path has once been made holy and beautiful by the humility of a royal saint.

CHAPTER II.

THE PROPHECY.

WEEKS had passed since the incident we have described above, and the festival of Christmas was being kept in the court of Westminster with unusual splendour. The building which had been the object of so much solicitude was at length completed, and its solemn dedication was fixed for the feast of the Holy Innocents. To do honour to the sacred festival, and, at the same time, to celebrate the consecration of the church with extraordinary magnificence, the entire nobility of England had been summoned to the court, and Westminster had never displayed a more brilliant or more august assemblage.

It was the 27th of December, the preparations for the ceremony were rapidly advancing, and all hearts were filled with the expectation of to-morrow's gorgeous spectacle. Apart from the gay and noble throng, Edward sat in a distant chamber of his palace, and the monk Aldred was his only companion. The room exhibited a strange confusion, and the royal inmate bore the signs of weariness and care. On the table and covering the floor beside him were papers and parchments without number: deeds of gifts and endowments, rent-rolls of the crown lands about to be made over to the new abbey; whilst standing apart, arranged by his own hands, were the vessels and sacred ornaments which were to be his dedication-offering at the altar.

"It is well nigh over now, Aldred," said the king, as he sank back in his chair, with an unusual languor in his look and tone: "I will give the papers to thy keeping, and thou wilt see that the sacred vessels are carried to the church."

"The festivities have fatigued your grace," observed *the monk, as he took* the papers from King Edward's

hand. "You will surely need a rest after this ceremony is brought to an end."

"And I shall have it, father," answered the king. "I am tired, as you say; for, of a truth, for three successive days to bear the weight of crown and sceptre and all this pomp of royalty, with the voice whispering in my heart that it is the closing scene, and the gates of eternity opening on my soul, has been a toilsome labour, and I shall be glad of rest;—and the rest," he added, "will be, I humbly trust, with God."

"My liege," said Aldred, "I had trusted that the fever which threatened you on Christmas night had passed away; I have watched you with anxious eyes during the banquet-scenes of these three days, nor have I been able to trace a return of the attack; and can it be possible that your grace is suffering still?"

"Only in the body, Aldred," replied the king; "think not, because I speak thus wearily, that the languor is in my heart, for, I thank God, never hath my soul been filled with a more abundant joy than during the sacred solemnities with which we have celebrated the sweet mysteries of Bethlehem. But it is hard to keep down nature; and though I would not sadden my people by yielding to the sickness whilst they were keeping holyday, it hath been preying on my heart. Even therefore was it that I hastened the dedication; for know, Aldred, that, if God grant me mercy, the Epiphany which these eyes are to behold will be in heaven, and not on earth."

"My lord," said Aldred, with something of remonstrance in his tone, "bethink you that God's times are in His own hand; it is well for us to be ready when He calls, yet scarcely wise to reckon so surely on the day of our visitation."

"Father," replied Edward, whilst his voice sank almost to a whisper, and a blush passed over his pale cheek, as though he hesitated to speak of some cherished secret, "canst thou recal the day when the two palmers from Palestine craved admittance to my pre-

sence on secret business? It is not yet a year ago, for Paschal tide had scarce begun."

"I mind it well," replied the monk: "men deemed their message was from the Grecian court, whose practice it often is to trust their weightiest embassies to the meanest hands."

"Their business," continued Edward, in the same low voice, "was to deliver me this ring, mine own signet, which I gave in alms, having, at the time, an empty purse, to a pilgrim who asked it of me for the love of St. John. Thou knowest it is a name which is wont to unlock my heart, and, though a piece of silver might have seemed a fitter offering, I dared not refuse the dear disciple of our Lord. I marvelled greatly when I saw the ring in the hands of those two palmers; yet know, father, that it was from him, the Evangelist of Christ, and mine own dear patron, that they received it, with the message that within a year he would visit me again, and call me to the following of the Spotless Lamb."

Aldred did not answer, for the tears were flowing from his eyes, and Edward continued: "Thou seest, therefore, that I reckon not the times of God from human fancies, but from His own divine and blessed warning. To me it will be a glad release; for my hand hath ever been too weak for the task of ruling, and I have long prayed that He would spare mine eyes from beholding the troubles that are to come. But the time is very short, and there is much to do; wherefore, now that thou knowest all. I would have thee help me in setting my house in order, that the last hours of my life may be all for God."

Before the day closed, every thing had been arranged concerning which the king desired to give his parting directions, and an evident weight had been taken from his mind. Aldred, while he could not consent to trust implicitly to the singular statement he had heard, still felt a presentiment of sorrow that he would scarcely acknowledge to himself;

but not a whisper of apprehension was heard among the courtiers, and the day of the Holy Innocents dawned as a high and joyous festival for the whole of England. The nobles and bishops of the entire kingdom were assembled within the abbey walls, and the grand and solemn office of the Church was celebrated with unexampled splendour. Yet it was remarked as unusual, that once or twice during the course of the Mass King Edward remained seated, instead of kneeling, as was his wont during the longest ceremonial, and that the looks of the Queen Edgitha were often directed towards him with something of anxiety. All at length was completed; the religious solemnity was at an end, and the officiating priests had retired from the altar; the clarions and trumpets of the soldiery outside burst out into a triumphant strain, and the courtly retinue waited but the rising of the king to form into the order of procession, in order to return to the palace. But, as if he had striven with and overmastered his disease only to see the fulfilment of that hour, Edward, as he made the effort to rise, sank fainting upon his seat; his head fell back, and, no longer able to struggle with the mortal agony so long repressed, he lay as one dying before the eyes of the assembled multitude. The accents of festivity and triumph were exchanged for a wail of sorrow; for not only did each man feel that the expiring form before them was that rather of a sainted father than of a sovereign, but too many foresaw, in his death, the coming woes which were to lay the English honour prostrate in the dust. He was immediately conveyed to the palace and laid upon his bed: every one thought that he would die in the arms of those who bore him, so utterly prostrated did he seem; nevertheless, though he lay for two days without speech or motion, he still breathed, and, at the end of that time, to the surprise of those who watched around him, awoke as if from sleep.

He raised himself in bed, and spoke; but the words were to God:

"O Almighty Lord," he said, "in whose hand are all things, who visitest the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, and who knowest all events before they come to pass, if the things now revealed to me be sent to me from Thee, give me voice and strength to declare them to my people, that with contrite hearts they may appease Thy wrath, and so the evils which Thou threatenest may be averted."

"He hath surely seen some heavenly vision, whilst we deemed him lifeless," whispered the monk Aldred to Edgitha, who knelt at the foot of the bed; and, as he spoke, a marvellous vigour seemed to re-animate the drooping form of the dying saint. The beautiful colour came back that was wont to be seen upon his cheek; his voice, of late so low and languid, became clear and powerful in its utterance; and, as though they gazed upon an evident miracle, all present sank upon their knees to catch the accents from his lips. He spoke again, and there was an unearthly sweetness in his tones.

"When," he said, "I was a young man, and lived in Normandy as an exile, that which was ever most grateful to me was the society of good men; and whatever persons appeared to me to be the purest, the best, and the most pious, within the sacred precincts of monastic life, were ever those who stood on terms of most familiar intercourse with me. Among these were two men who, by the holiness of their words, the purity of their lives, and the gentleness of their manners, won my special admiration and affection. Them I constantly visited, for their eloquent discourse was sweeter to my mind than honey to the tongue.

"Now these two men, long since removed from earth to heaven, but even now stood by me as I lay buried in slumber; and, in obedience to the command of God, they have declared to me what should befall my people after my death. They said that the measure of English *wickedness* is full, and that the iniquity of England is *consummated;* that it has provoked the wrath of God,

and calls to heaven for vengeance, because her priests have defiled the holy covenant, and with polluted hearts have laid their hands on holy things; because they have acted as hirelings and not as shepherds, and have forsaken their flocks, and cared for the milk and the wool, and not for the sheep themselves; therefore death shall feed alike upon shepherds and upon sheep, when both are thrust down into hell.

"Then they said that the nobles of the land were unbelievers, robbers of their country, men in whom God's majesty inspires no fear, and the law no respect, to whom truth and justice are a burden, and cruelty is become a pastime, so that our rulers have ceased to care for equity, and our subjects make jest of loyalty and obedience. And because these things are so, God even now brandishes His sword and bends His bow against them, and a heavy doom is hanging over their heads. His wrath will be manifested, and evil spirits will be sent against them, to whose power they will be delivered over for a year and a day, to be punished with fire and the sword.

"And when I heard these things, I was filled with grief for the calamities of my people; and I cried and said, 'O ye who are cognisant of the secrets of heaven, tell me, if the English people be converted and do penance, will not God forgive them? For penance suspended the sentence which had gone forth against the Ninevites, and the vengeance which had been provoked by the impious Achab. Therefore I will persuade my people to repent of their past sins, and to live more circumspectly for the future; and it may be God will take pity on them, and so this great evil may not come to pass, and He who is prepared to punish them as His foes may receive them into His grace as repentant sinners.' 'No,' they replied; 'this they may not change, for the heart of thy people is hardened and their eyes are heavy, and they will not regard thy warning, nor be moved either by threats or by kindness.'

"Then," pursued the king, "my sorrow greatly in-

creased when I heard these words, and I said, 'Will God, then, be angry for ever? Is there no time fixed when He shall be appeased? And when shall be the day when joy shall succeed to adversity, and there shall be an end to the sorrow of England? What remedy is to be looked for in the midst of so many afflictions, so that, whilst grief and woe may endure for a while, we may look that the mercy of heaven may be hereafter exhibited?'

"And, as I put these questions, the messengers of God made answer to me in a parable; and they said:

"'When a green tree, cut down from its trunk and separated at a distance of *three acres* from its parent root, shall, *with no man's hand aiding it and no necessity forcing it*, return to its parent stem, and, engrafted upon its ancient stock, shall have again its sap restored to it, and flower again, and produce fruits, then may be hoped for some consolation for tribulation, and a remedy for the adversity that we have predicted.'

"And, having spoken these words, they returned to heaven, and I was restored to consciousness, as you beheld."

The attendant group had listened with breathless attention as Edward had delivered his prophetic words, and as they ceased, he sank back upon his pillow; once more the light waned from his gentle eyes, and the colour which had flushed his cheek a moment before with the bloom of health and vigour once more vanished, and left it of a deathly pallor. They saw that the last hour was indeed at hand, and, as the truth forced its way to their unwilling hearts, they broke into passionate weeping.

But Edward roused his failing strength to comfort them in their sorrow. "If you loved me," he said, in the words of his Master, "you would rejoice, because I go to the Father; not through my merits, but through the compassionate grace of my Lord and Saviour. Nevertheless, follow me, who have been your friend, with *your loving* prayers, and resist those who would hinder

my ascent to the celestial country, with your psalms and almsdeeds; for though my faith in the Crucified cannot be overcome by my enemies, yet no man can leave this world so perfect that those foul fiends will not attempt to impede or terrify him."

Then he bade farewell to each one separately, and spoke aloud to all of the nobleness and virtue of his queen. He gave orders for the kind treatment of all his servants, and for the burial of his body, which he entreated might be laid in the abbey-church, and that all men would pray charitably for his soul. Then, having made his last dispositions of temporal things, he bade the priests be called for, and prepared for the reception of the usual sacraments of the dying.

The concluding scene has been given in such noble and eloquent words by a writer* whose account is taken from the old biography of Ailred, that we shall make no apology for transferring the passage to our pages as it stands in his:

"Perceiving the queen weeping abundantly and sighing constantly, he said to her, 'Weep not for me, daughter; for I shall not die, but live. I am departing from the land of the dying, to live, as I believe, in our Lord's blessed land of the living.' So, commending himself totally and absolutely to God, in the full faith of Christ, with all the Sacraments of Christ, in the hope of the promises of Christ, this old man, in the fulness of his days, departed from this world, and his pure spirit abandoning its pure flesh, was, as a victor, united and for ever to the Creator of all spirits; and ascending, it was received by the citizens of heaven, and the ethereal key-bearer opened for it the gates of Paradise; whilst, in the fulfilment of his promise, John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, met the sanctified soul; and virgin associated with virgins to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth for ever.

"It would not be possible," he continues, "to describe what mighty fear then fell upon the minds of men,

* M'Cabe's *Catholic History of England.*

nor what amount of grief possessed their hearts, as if a thick dark cloud had rested over the entire island. It was with such feelings that the relatives and friends of the king stood by his sacred remains, when suddenly the lifeless corpse assumed the semblance of that beatitude which had been bestowed upon Edward; for the countenance of the dead became suffused with a roseate hue, so pure and so entrancing, that it seemed to come from heaven, and won at once the admiration of all who gazed upon it. All marvelled at the spectacle; but still more were they astonished when they found his uncovered body was glorious with beauty, and that the snow-white flesh seemed refulgent with a dazzling light, so that the honour of his stainless virginity was made manifest even to unbelievers. The royal remains were prepared for interment; the body was rolled up in precious linen and gorgeous robes; and at the same time the poor of Christ were relieved with abundant alms. The bishops were present; crowds of priests and clerks were there; the earls of the kingdom with nobles and thanes were assembled; and vast multitudes of both sexes gathered around the body of the king. On one side was to be heard the intoning of psalms, and on the other the shrill notes of grief, which came from tearful crowds. In all places joy was commingled with sorrow; joy, because of the king, who all were conscious had passed to heaven; sorrow, because, by his death, they knew themselves to have endured a loss that was irreparable.

"They bore to the church that temple of chastity and abode of virtue, the body of the king; and they offered up for the king himself the Sacrifice of Salvation. And thus, in the place which he had himself determined upon, he was buried with all honour; and there, until the last day, lies his body, awaiting the blessed resurrection bestowed by our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen."

The sepulchre of the saint is with us to this day; his shrine, rifled of its jewels and its costly treasures, yet contains the relics, that are a richer treasure than the regalia of his crown.

The last prophecy uttered by his lips, which we have given as it stands in the histories of his own time, was thought by many to have found its fulfilment in the woes that fell on the Saxon race at the Norman conquest, and in the subsequent union of the rival lines, by the marriage of Henry I. with Matilda, the heiress of the royal Saxon blood, and the birth of their son, Henry II. Nevertheless, we can scarcely avoid the application of these singular words to later times; and now that three centuries after the religion which raised the Confessor to our altars had been rooted out of the land, and the faith of England had been torn from its parent stem, we have seen in our own day, "no man's hand aiding it, and no necessity forcing it," the promise of a large return, and hundreds hastening once more to be "engrafted on the ancient root," the prophecy of our royal Saint has seemed to hold out the hope of better days, when England shall once more produce the flowers and the fruits of sanctity, and the remedy of her long tribulation shall be found in her recovered faith.

XIX.

THE WINDOWS OF SAN PETRONIO.

A STORY FROM THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED JAMES OF ULM.

IN a small chamber, ill-arranged for the purpose of an artist's work-room, with few of the conveniences and nothing of the professional show common in the studios of the time, there sat a painter busily employed in putting the last touches to a work of elaborate design, which had been the result of many months of painful and incessant labour. It was on glass, and evidently intended for a window of extraordinary size; and the rich colours and skilful arrangement of the figures betokened that they were the production of no common hand. In truth, though the black scapular which he wore over a rough woollen habit of white showed that the artist claimed no higher rank than that of lay brother in a convent of preaching friars, yet it would not be too much to say that Giacomo the German, as he was called in his adopted city of Bologna, was one of the most distinguished painters of his day. As you looked at him, in spite of the poverty of his dress, a feeling would force its way that the man before you was remarkable for something more than artistic genius. Through the chastened demeanour of the religious you might trace the remains of a noble and military bearing, which seemed to show that Giacomo had once followed a different calling from that he now pursued; and yet, when you glanced at his shaven head and the expression of his calm and tranquil eye, the conviction was just as irresistible that, whatever might have been his former *life, the cloister* alone was the true home for one who

bore in every feature the lineaments of a saint. In fact, Giacomo's reputation for sanctity was as great as the celebrity of his paintings; and among the disciples who flocked about him, there were many who sought the society of the great master rather for the guidance of their souls than from a love of his professional skill.

On the morning of which we speak he had, however, but a single companion, a young man in the secular dress, who sat apart from Giacomo grinding the colours for his use, and watching the movements of his pencil and the progress of his work in unbroken silence. He was considerably younger than the German; and you might see, from the darker hue of his complexion, that he was not a fellow-countryman. A singular beauty was visible in his countenance, where the light of great intelligence was mingled with so pure and childlike an expression, that, as his comrades were wont to say, Fra Giacomo could do no better than take his disciple, Ambrogino of Soncino, for the model of a cherub. On the present occasion it was evident that both he and his master took more than ordinary interest in their work, which was now rapidly approaching its completion.

The young man was the first to break the silence in which they had hitherto pursued their labour, and an expression of delight broke from his lips as he surveyed the finishing strokes of the painter. "San Petronio!" he exclaimed, "the canons will have the rarest windows in all Bologna. This morning's work will be the last, Giacomo; and, if I mistake not, it hath been eighteen months in hand."

"And eighteen minutes by and by may, for aught we know, spoil the whole," answered Giacomo, with his usual tranquil smile; "wherefore, my Ambrogino, I would not have thee too boastful in thy glee, lest the furnace may chance to mar all the colours thou hast been grinding so patiently for these long months past."

"Does such a chance often happen, my father?"

inquired Ambrogino. "I have heard it said that men are as little to be trusted as a glass furnace; but I knew not what was meant."

"Thou wilt know better ere thou hast lighted the furnace of San Domenico a dozen times," replied Giacomo; "it hath spoiled my best works, and taught me lessons of patience which I found it over hard to learn some thirty years ago. Thanks to its teaching, however, the task is easier now; but when thou, Ambrogino, shalt hear the cracking of thy first window, and shalt know thy time and labour thrown away, be on thy guard lest Satan have a triumph, for, in truth, there is vexation in the sound."

"And is there no remedy against such mishaps?" continued the young man; "I have seen you test the furnace, and count the very minutes that the glass hath been subjected to the heat, with a curious care; nor, as I remember, has there been an accident since I have been within your studio."

"Surely," said Giacomo, "care and patience are excellent remedies for all things. It is only when the furnace is overheated, or the glass detained too long, that there is any danger; but a few minutes may do the work, and shiver all to a thousand fragments; and if such a fate should be in store for the windows of San Petronio, both thou and I, Ambrogino, must bear the disappointment as best we may."

"And that will be ill enough," said Ambrogino. "But thou wilt watch the furnace, Giacomo, and I will be here to aid thee; and San Petronio will care for his own windows, and thou wilt see this time all will go well."

The master smiled at the impetuosity of his young companion, and proceeded to prepare the furnace which had been the subject of their conversation. It was clumsy and ill-contrived, and took some time to light and set in order. "It will be a good forty minutes," said Giacomo, turning to his disciple, "ere the glass must be fixed for burning; and before we venture to do

so, we must test the heat, and cool it if it be excessive; for this is the first danger to the painting. Then we must watch the work and count the time; and when the hour is up, be nimble with our hands, for I have known a five minutes' delay do many months of mischief."

"And these forty minutes," said Ambrogino, as he sat at his master's feet, to wait the heating of the furnace, with something of the familiarity of a favourite child, "these forty minutes' watch thou must spend as thou hast promised, and tell me the story of thy life, and how thou, who wert a soldier once, art now a painter and a friar."

"Well, as thou sayest, it hath been a promise," answered Giacomo, "which thou hast earned by thy patient service at the colours. Nevertheless, if I weary thee, thou must not marvel; for, in truth, there are few men's lives much worth the telling. As thou knowest, Ambrogino, I am not of thy country; I was born further north, in the country they call Swabia, and in the great city of Ulm. My father was a merchant, and would fain have had me follow his trade; and, indeed, I did travel in his company more than once to the town of Flanders, where his business carried him every year, and it was there I got my first love for this glass-painting. For thou must know I had, like thee, Ambrogino, a restless mind; my chamber was filled with twenty works begun but never finished. I tried mechanics for a while, and filled the house with water-clocks and spinning-wheels of new invention; but my mother said they seldom answered, and that I should do better to settle to the cloth-trade, like an honest burgher, and leave glass-painting and clock-making to abler hands. But I could not settle, and somehow it was not altogether a boyish restlessness that filled my head with idle dreams; it seemed to me that I had not hold of the will of God in aught that I did; for, indeed, I had been Christianly taught and nurtured, and I knew well that a man can do well only where God calls him, and no

where else. Now it chanced, when I was about thine own age, that the thought came to me that I might find an answer to the doubts that perplexed me as to my future course by making pilgrimage to some holy shrine; and so soon as I conceived the plan, there was no rest till I had put it in execution. I had ever a devotion to the great apostles; and every year, as the Easter pilgrims came back to Ulm and told of all the holy sights of Rome, my heart yearned to kiss the sacred threshold, and to bathe it with my tears. My father saw it was useless to hinder me in my design, though he had been well content could I but have turned my thoughts to business. Nevertheless, he gave me his blessing; and I set forth with a staff and a well-filled purse, for Theodoric of Ulm was a wealthy burgher, and, little as he loved my thoughts of travel, he would not, as he said, that I should bring disgrace upon his house and fall into ill company through poverty. I will not tell thee, neither indeed can I, what kind of thoughts stirred my heart when I found myself in that most wondrous city. Surely there is a strange sweetness in its very air, as though from the soil that had been watered with the martyrs' blood fresh and very odoriferous flowers were daily springing. Methought I could have dwelt there for ever, and that, rich or poor, it were happiness enough to make my daily prayer beside the tomb where throbs the heart and life-blood of Christendom. But even there the old restlessness returned; and I was fain to travel further south, even as far as Naples, where Alfonso of Arragon was then in arms with the states of Genoa, defending his crown like a stout and valiant king. My money by this time was all spent, and I knew not where to look for more; for, indeed, neither my clocks nor my spinning-wheels were likely to find much favour in the idle south, had I a mind to go back to the making of them; but no such thought was in my mind.

"Ambrogino," continued the friar, after a pause, *during which a look* of unusual pensiveness had passed

over his face, "there are strange mysteries in these hearts of ours, which God only can read aright. Thou art wont to call me the tranquil Giacomo, and to marvel, perhaps, how one so dull and spiritless could ever have borne part in the stir and tumult of battle. And, I thank God, I am tranquil; but it was not always so. Perchance thou hast sometime watched a mountain-stream, as it fell foaming from rock to rock, dashing itself to a silvery spray at every bound, and deafening the very ear with its loud and angry roaring; and perhaps thou hast followed it in its course, and hast seen it reach the plain below, flowing swiftly and hurriedly at first, but soon with a gentler motion, until at length thou mayest have looked down on it, winding like a silver thread among the meadows, and scarcely murmuring against its grassy banks, as it won its way in unruffled calm towards the deep and tranquil sea. Even so is it with some souls whom God calls powerfully to Himself; yet they know not His voice, even while its sound is in their ears, and its echoes haunt and trouble them, and will not suffer them to take their rest in aught save Him alone. In the world they never rest, but wander from one thing to another, and spend their energies and their tears in vain and fruitless efforts to find the thing which is to be their life; but it never comes: they feel after it in the dark, if haply they may touch and grasp it, but all is empty air, which they beat with idle disappointed hands. And all the while the world is calling them turbulent and unquiet; and so they are, for they are ill at ease,—they are not the world's children, and it cannot even satisfy their passions, far less subdue them into quietude; and so they wander to and fro, and sometimes break out into wild excesses, and sometimes try to still the voice within them by the stir and distraction of a busy life. Then the day comes when God makes all light to them, and they are different men; He takes them to their true home within His arms, and they lie upon His bosom, like tired children, and rest, it may be with a truer

sense of rest than they who have never wandered from His side. And thus much I say to thee, Ambrogino, because thou art wont to wonder how Giacomo, the lay brother and the glass-painter, whom thou seest telling his beads at the convent-gate, or happy at his daily work, can have felt so strong an impulsion to deeds of martial valour. But, my child, till we find the truth, we are content with counterfeits, and busy ourselves with pictures and fantasies of the life which is to be our home. And to a brave man there is in the soldier's life, with its labour, its self-denying sufferings, its obedience, and its gallant devotion to struggle with and conquer a cruel enemy in a noble cause,—there is, I say, a likeness and a shadowing of the Christian fight; nor do I doubt but that to pure and chivalrous hearts the knightly course may be the path of sanctity, if it be trodden in the grace of God. So, too, the pilgrim, as he wanders, staff in hand, through distant lands, and scarce can tell what impulse leads him on, may find the secret of his wanderings in the unconscious picture ever before his eyes of the life of the sons of God, who have here no abiding city, but are ever seeking one to come; and with wayworn tired feet are toiling on, strangers and pilgrims in a world that counts them not its own."

"But tell me, dear Giacomo," interrupted his young listener, "how did thy soldier's life speed with thee? Men say that it is a glorious thing when, with banners forward, and lance in rest, they go down into the *mêlée;* though, in truth, it is not so I would care to die."

"Thou art right, my Ambrogino," answered the painter, "that hand of thine was never meant for sword or halberd; though, in truth, I have seen men die a Christian death even on the battle-field; and the broad cross of their good swords has had the last look from their eyes, and the last kiss from their dying lips. Well, I entered into King Alfonso's service, and abode with him to the last; though it was the losing side, and *at length the* Genoese were masters. I had my share

of the fighting; but I found little to meet my dreams of a soldier's calling among the ranks of his mercenaries and free-companions. They were the offscouring of all lands; and a weary time I had with them, for I could not do as they did; and so, with all my martial ardour, the camp was as little my home as the merchant's shop at Ulm."

"And so thou wast soon tired of the sword," said Ambrogino; "but they say there was a reason for thy departure from the ranks, though I have never heard the tale."

"Why, thou seest, Ambrogino," returned Giacomo, with something of an awkward bashfulness in his tone, "I have said I could not do as they did. I could not forget my gentle mother's nurture, and the lessons I had learnt at her knee. They were a reckless set, and thought more of plunder than of glory; and whereas I deemed it no dishonour to a soldier's name to be pitiful and courteous to prisoners, devout to God, and terrible only to the enemies of Holy Church, they were all for bloodshed and rapine; and the peasantry of our own people hated us for the ruin that followed on our steps. Now I could not in conscience witness these things unmoved, and I spoke what was in my heart, even as I think God moved me; neither could I ever share in the plunder which they brought to camp. For which things they railed on me as superstitious; and at length they devised a scheme for making me the butt of a foolish jest. It fell out thus: on a certain day I had been sent, with others of our company, to a distant post; we had been on foot all day, and came home weary and hungry. As soon as I had returned to our quarters, some of my comrades came to me with seeming kindness and invited me to dine. 'We knew,' they said, 'that you would have a long march of it, and but little time on your return for preparing a dinner, so we have made all ready, and this day you must dine with us.' I bore them no ill-will, and was well content to accept their offer, for, in truth, I was very hungry; so I went

back with them to the place they had appointed, and the dinner was set before me. After I had well eaten, I began to see that there were smiles and whispers passing among them, and some jest in which I was not a sharer. I thought it might be that my appetite was the cause of their merriment; and the more so when one of them, he who had bidden me to the dinner, addressed me in a jeering tone: 'What thinkest thou of our table, comrade?' he said; 'thou hast eaten heartily of what we have set before thee, and as though thou didst relish the viands well enough.' 'I have eaten as a hungry man,' I answered; 'nor knew I till to-day that a good appetite was reckoned to be want of manners among the ranks of the free-companions.' A shout of laughter followed my words; and when the uproar was a little subsided, my host spoke to me again. 'Excellent Giacomo,' he said, 'it is not that thy appetite offends us in any wise; we rather rejoice that thou hast attained so great a liberty of heart. Know, then, that all which thou seest before thee, and of which thou hast so joyously partaken, hath been stolen goods: the fowls a day ago were roosting in the barns of our neighbour in the valley; those luscious grapes thou hast so fondly handled were hanging in his vineyard ripe for the vintage; the wine was pressed into the king's service, as the mules of Don Antonio were contentedly carrying it to the residence of the royal intendant; and the very oil which dressed these vegetables—it is the best of all—the oil, I say, was stolen by our nimblest hand from the synagogue of the Jewish dogs of Capua, as it burnt, after their custom, before the books of their law. So now thou hast shared in our plunder like an honest fellow, and art witness to thyself that stolen meats have a marvellously pleasant flavour;' and then they renewed their laughter and merriment; but the thing cut me to the quick. Perhaps I was over-hasty, but their villanies sickened me; and before another day had passed, I had turned my back on the camp, and was far on the road to Capua. My soldiering was now

over for a time; and yet I must needs do something for my bread; and things so fell out that it was not long before I was engaged in the service of a great lawyer in the city, who used me well, and in whose house I lived for nearly five years, serving him as his scrivener."

"That was a great change, Giacomo," observed Ambrogino; "how did the scrivener's stool and pen suit thy wandering pilgrim fancies and thy martial humour?"

"I was five years older, my child," replied Giacomo, "and had learnt that a man must do as he can, and not always as he will. Nevertheless, it was distasteful enough; and I often cast a wistful look at the staff I had carried from Germany, and the broadsword that hung over my bed. Moreover, I had a strange longing once more to see my home, and to hear the accents of my fatherland; for albeit your tongue is softer and more musical, it hath not the homeliness and heartiness, to my thinking, of our German speech; and, in short, after the five years were ended, I besought my master for leave to return to Swabia and get my father's blessing before he died. But he would not hear of my departure; wherefore I was fain to take another course. I did not resolve on the thing till I had prayed before the crucifix that I might be led aright; and then I laid aside the clothes that I had received from my master's hands, and the money he had paid me, and once more taking my tattered soldier's habit and my pilgrim staff, I set out in secret and by night, and bent my steps towards the north. At length I entered this city of Bologna; and there the first news that greeted my ears, from a countryman whom I met with in the streets and had known in old times at Ulm, was that my father was dead, and that there was no home now in Swabia for Giacomo. I felt saddened and out of heart: there was no cause now for my hurrying to the empty house, where all would be strange, and where there would be none of the familiar greetings for which I had been longing. For the first time in my life I was content to

abide in quiet; and God so willing it, I once more entered as a soldier in the service of the Visconti, who, as thou knowest, Ambrogino, had a hard matter just then to defend the rights of the Holy Pontiff. In truth, I found matters very different from the license of the free companies. But I was not happy; that restless longing for I knew not what was like a hunger in my heart; and I knew no other way of easing the anguish which I often suffered than by praying in the churches, and chiefly in our own church of San Domenico. I ever had a reverence for the holy Spaniard, who was surely God's soldier in a righteous cause, and had a soldier's great heart and gallant spirit; and I loved to spend hours by his sepulchre, and ask for God's guidance and Our Lady's help.

"Tell me, Ambrogino," continued the old man, "doth it not seem to thee that there are some days when the windows of heaven are more open than on others—such a dew of grace falls on our souls, and such a fulness and excess of light? There are days, too, which are regenerations; we rise in the morning, and all seems as at other times, and we are neither gladder nor holier than our common wont; and yet, at the hour when God has willed from all eternity, we go to meet our fate; and before that day's sun has set, we have a new being given to us. A sin has been washed away, or a soul been saved; God's voice has been heard;—yea, more, it has been answered. We are no longer blind and pitiful wanderers, but have safe hold of our Father's hand; and when we lie down to rest at night we thank God and take courage, for we know that it is well with us, and that we are at rest. Now it was so with me on the day whereof I am about to speak. My heart was very full, and such a constraining desire came over me to spend the hours alone where no man might observe me, that I could not settle to my accustomed work. 'I will go to the Friars' Church,' I said to myself, 'and it may be this folly will pass away, as it hath done at *other times.*' So I turned in hither and took my wonted

post, and prayed the good God to give me peace. But it was all to no purpose, nay, it seemed as though the very deeps of my soul were broken up; and yet I knew not what it was that moved me, or what I would ask from God. I know not how long I remained thus before the altar; but at length I felt a hand upon my shoulder, and a voice sounded in my ears. It was that of Father Alessandro, who was then the prior, though now he hath gone to his rest. 'Brother,' he said, 'thou art surely in some great trouble (for I was weeping like a child); and I would fain minister to thy grief. Thou art not wholly strange to me, for I have marked thee many times praying in our church, rather like a friar than a man-at-arms; tell me, then, is there a sin on thy conscience?—or what is the cause that thou, a soldier and a man of mature years, should be weeping like a very woman?' O Ambrogino, it was not his words, it was the Lord God, who that moment drew the veil from my eyes, and made all clear to me! I did not stay my weeping, but I fell at his feet and kissed the very dust of that dear pavement; and I said, 'Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.' 'What wouldst thou?' said the prior; for he marvelled at my words even more than at my tears; and so, to make a long tale short, I told him all. I told him the story of my life, and the weariness that had been ever in my heart, and how, at the sound of his voice that day God had answered all my doubts, and shown me that the home whereto He had called me from a child was His own house and His own most blessed service. And they heard me, Ambrogino,—they took me, the poor friendless soldier, into their company; and when a year after I was to make my solemn profession before that very altar, I could not contain the joy that was in my soul, but went round on my knees from one to another, and prayed them of their goodness and pity to keep Giacomo among them, and not to drive him from them for his vileness and unworthiness.

"And now thou hast heard all; and if thou wouldst know whether the old longing ever returns, know that the cloister gives me all I ever asked from life. I am on my true pilgrimage, and listed under my rightful banner: I am where God wills me to be, and He hath given me the fulness of perfect peace."

As Giacomo finished his story, there was a pause of some moments: at length Ambrogino said, "I would fain know the secret of that peace, my father."

"Nay," replied his companion, "I am a poor philosopher to tell thee why and how, like the doctors of the schools. I cannot tell thee *why* the touch of silver upon melted glass* should turn it to a golden tint, silver and gold being, as one may say, opposite and unlikely things: neither can I say *how* it falls out that a man, by the renouncing of his own wills, should gain a happiness which others vainly seek in their gratification. I only know it is so, and that obedience is the sweetest yoke of our sweet Master, the very touch of His own hand, which He lays upon the weary, and their heavy burdens fall from off their shoulders, and leave them light-hearted as children."

Ambrogino did not reply: he well knew that Giacomo's reputation for religious obedience was of so singular a kind as to have extended beyond the walls of his own convent; and though it was a virtue less appreciable to the world outside than many of more brilliant character might have been, yet even men of the world had learnt to reverence the saintliness of the artist-friar, though it was often displayed in ways they could not comprehend. But however much disposed he might have felt to question his master, or, as he loved to term him in familiar discourse, his father, a little further, he plainly saw the present was no fit time. Giacomo's head had sunk upon his breast, and his eyes were nearly closed. Scarcely even did he seem

* The Blessed James of Ulm is said to have been the first to *discover the tinting* of glass to a yellow colour by means of *oxide of silver.*

conscious of the presence of his companion; and the young man, who knew his master's way, little doubted but that he was rapt in overflowing thanksgiving and prayer. He, too, had his own thoughts; and the painter's words, "the cloister gives me all I asked from life," were echoing in his heart.

At length Giacomo roused himself with an effort, and, assuming a different tone, reminded his pupil that their day's work was yet before them. "In my idle talking," he said, "I had well-nigh forgotten the furnace, which is surely ready heated for the glass; and now, Ambrogino, thou must take thy first lesson in colour-burning, and do thy best to help me, for the honour of God and San Petronio."

A few minutes more and they were busily at work; the rich windows, which had so excited Ambrogino's admiration, and which were the acknowledged masterpieces of the artist, were fixed in their place; and all that remained to be done was to keep the furnace at the same temperature, and mark the time, so that exactly at the juncture when the colours should be fixed, the glass might be carefully removed, before an overlong exposure to the heat put them in danger of being cracked or injured. A kind of hour-glass, made to run for the space calculated for this purpose, was the only timepiece used by the friar-preacher, whose studio had all the poverty of a convent-cell. This was placed before the furnace, and then the two companions sat down to watch for the critical moment of removal. The silence was again unbroken; and again, as Ambrogino fixed his eyes on the countenance of his venerable master, he felt a kind of awe as he marked its expression. It seemed as though, when the business or conversation of the moment was over, Giacomo's soul ever fell back to prayer, as the stone falls to the ground and seeks its centre when loosened from the grasp. There he sat, with his eyes bent in abstraction on the furnace-door; the beads were in his hand, and his lips were moving gently and noiselessly; and as Ambrogino,

weary at times of sitting still, would rise and busy himself about the room, his movements caused no disturbance to his master, whose thoughts were evidently powerfully absorbed. The sand was running to its bottom, and the moment so longed for by Ambrogino was nearly at hand. Every thing had gone well: the furnace had burnt steadily, and there had been none of those warning cracks of which his master had spoken in the morning; ten minutes more and the windows of San Petronio would be safe upon the table, and the greatest work of the greatest master of Bologna completed, as Ambrogino proudly thought, for the admiration of a hundred ages. "And I shall have helped him," he exclaimed aloud. "Oh, that the sand would but run a little faster, and suffer me to open the furnace-door!"

But the furnace-door was not destined to be the first to open: even as he spoke, that of the chamber in which they sat was flung a little hastily on its hinges, and one of the lay brothers of the convent entered. "Fra Giacomo," he said, addressing the painter, who had just risen, and was preparing to commence the removal of his glass, "the father-procurator desires that thou go out on the quest to-day. Fra Anastasio is to be thy companion, and he waits for thee even now at the convent-gate. I pray thee, moreover, delay not; for I have already lost some minutes searching for thee in thy cell."

"I am coming," replied Giacomo, in his usual tranquil tone, as he drew his hood over his face and took his mantle. "Ambrogino, my child," he added, turning to the youth, "there will be nought more for thee to do to-day; thou mayest return to-morrow."

"And the windows?" gasped Ambrogino; "thou wilt surely remove them first: the glass is all run out, and it is the very moment we have been waiting for."

Perhaps there was something of wistfulness in the *glance* Giacomo cast on the furnace-door; and the *young man* thought his voice was tremulous for a mo-

ment, as he replied, "God will have our windows for Himself, my Ambrogino; and look not so disconsolate, for obedience is better than the blood of victims; thou must not forget that Giacomo is less the painter than he is the mendicant of his convent."

He was gone before there was time for another word, and Ambrogino remained in a kind of stupefied dismay. Then his natural impetuosity broke out into a kind of passion: he stamped the floor and clasped his hands before his face, then, sinking into the chair from whence his master had just risen, his grief found vent in a flood of boyish tears. "His best work!" he exclaimed, "ay, and such a work as Bologna has never seen; his own favourite, as I know, and the thing whereon he has spent his choicest skill and all the secrets of his art. And to be ruined for the whim of a tyrannic master! He, the first painter of our city, to be sent begging through its streets, whilst his masterpiece is in the fire! Oh, it would chafe the very seraphs, this senseless thing they call obedience! And I know his meaning well in those last words: he deems that I, too, am one day to wear the habit of St. Dominic, and perchance that I am to profit by this first lesson; but may I never grind colours more, if I place my reason and the gifts which God hath given me under the heel of some dull clerk, who knows not the tracery of Angelico's fingers from the daubing of a signpost!"

He rose from his seat and walked rapidly to and fro, then stopped before the furnace-door and listened if there were any sign of mischief. "If I dared but take them out!" he muttered; "but I know not the fixing, and they would be broken to a thousand fragments. No, there is no help for it; and I can but wait and see the ruin of what I cared for as though mine own fingers had done the work!"

He sat down to await Giacomo's return, for he could not persuade himself to leave the spot: perhaps something might turn up to be done, or Giacomo might

have a fortunate quest, and even yet be back in time; anyhow his young disciple determined to keep his guard by the furnace in which his favourite windows were enclosed. And, as his first passion abated, the painter's words came back to him with a singular sweetness, "God will have our windows for Himself." It was, then, no feeling of slavish submission to a tyrannic law that prompted his obedience; and in that moment of human disappointment the only movement of his heart had been one of sacrifice to God. Certainly there was something deeper in all this than at first appeared; and every moment, as Ambrogino pondered over his master's obedience, it assumed a more admirable character in his eyes. He felt all the greatness of the sacrifice itself: the works thus abandoned to destruction without a word or gesture of regret were not only of great value, but would have placed Giacomo's reputation as an artist beyond the competition of all his rivals. Moreover, the young man had enough of the enthusiasm of his profession to know that the value of a work of art, or even the admiration and renown it may win from the world, forms but a small part of its worth in the eyes of its author. He knew that to creative genius the works to which it has given birth are dear as children; they bear the impress of the soul that has produced them; they are the expressions of his thoughts, and have, as it were, shared in the very confidence of his heart; and he knew that Giacomo's sacrifice must needs have cost him something. He knew, moreover, that it had been generously made: the reputation and character of the painter would surely have obtained some indulgence in such a case, and a word from his lips would have been enough to have relieved him from the necessity of his obedience. His compliance was not compulsory or unavoidable, but a willing offering for the perfection of religious virtue. And as Ambrogino thought of all these things, he felt *that this* perhaps was destined to be for him one of *those days of* grace and illumination of which the painter

had spoken in his morning's story. The hours passed swiftly on, as the young man remained buried in thought before the unlucky furnace, and it was already evening, when he was startled from his long reverie by the sound of his master's step at the door of the chamber.

Giacomo entered: his face bore the expression of fatigue, for the quest that day had been long and to little purpose; yet in its look of weariness there was the same sweet tranquillity that always distinguished it. "What still here, Ambrogino!" he exclaimed, as his eye rested on his pupil; "I meant not that thou shouldst tarry for my return."

"But I could not go, dear Giacomo," said the youth, "I thought—I hoped that something might yet be done."

Giacomo went to the furnace-door and laid his hand upon the fastening: then he paused, and Ambrogino thought he saw the glistening of a tear on the old man's cheek. Another moment and the door was opened, and the frames in which the windows were fixed were in the painter's hand.

"Mother of God!" he heard him say, in a tone of wonder, "this is thy doing!" He could not be mistaken now, the tears were indeed falling thick and fast upon the glass, as his master bent, so thought the youth, over his ruined work, and, with a sudden impulse, Ambrogino sprang to the old man's side. As he, too, bent over the frames and eagerly scanned them with his eye, he could detect no flaw or crack upon the polished surface, and his heart beat fast with a strange hope, which yet he hardly dared to trust.

"Look, Ambrogino," at length faltered the artist, as he held the paintings against the open casement and displayed them to the light, "the windows are unbroken, and the colours fixed as never yet I saw them. This is God's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

Ambrogino looked, and scarcely dared believe his eyes: the glass was not only perfect and unmarred in

every part, but the colours of the paintings, as the bright light of the now setting sun streamed through them on the ground, wore a richness of hue such as he had never seen or imagined. The figures, too, had a grandeur in their design which was surely new; there was a majesty and devotion about them which surpassed even Giacomo's skill, and he could not doubt that he was gazing on the effects of a Divine and supernatural interference.

"Said I not, my child, that God had claimed our windows for Himself?" said the painter. "Lo, He hath wrought a great work this day, and we will thank him for it, as it is meet."

"It was the reward of thine obedience," said Ambrogino.

"Nay, rather," interrupted his master, "it was to teach thee the value and worth of obedience in God's eyes. And let not the lesson be lost; for if He hath suffered thee to behold a miracle, it was that thou shouldst learn this truth, that the abjection of a despised lay brother is dearer in His eyes than the genius of a thousand painters."

The windows of San Petronio may still be seen in the church of that name at Bologna; but the injuries of time have left scarcely a trace of their original magnificence. Giacomo himself, to whose heroic obedience this miraculous token was granted, lies buried in the same church where he gained his vocation to religion, not far from the sepulchre of his great patriarch, St. Dominic. He is the only painter of his order who has received the solemn beatification of the Church; but amid the number who have shared the hereditary genius of the Dominican institute, and whose reputation for sanctity has been counted to rival their skill as artists, the writers of the day reckon Fra Ambrogino of Soncino as a worthy inheritor of the skill and holiness of his master, the Blessed James of Ulm.

XX.

THE VESSELS OF ST. PETER.

THE fifth century was dawning over the wreck of the Roman Empire. Eight years had passed since the death of the great Theodosius, and his feeble successors were unable to resist the tide of barbaric conquest that swept over the desolated provinces of the west. The whole Gothic nation was in arms under the victorious chieftain Alaric, whose forces had already twice appeared under the walls of Rome, and had twice withdrawn after the exaction of enormous contributions from the citizens. Rome, at the period of which we speak, could be called neither Pagan nor Christian; for, in spite of the triumph of the Cross under Constantine, and the more formal abolition of the pagan rites under Theodosius, there had always remained a strong faction attached to the old superstitions, ever ready to attribute the misfortunes of the empire to the influence of the Christians, and to seize every opportunity for pressing the restoration of the ancient idolatry.

Half of the senate was composed of the supporters of heathenism, and the city itself presented many strange contrasts to the eye; for the basilicas of modern erection stood side by side with the temples of the gods, where the public exercise of the pagan worship had only been discontinued since the edict of Theodosius.

In fact, at the period of which we speak that worship had been already partially restored. Availing themselves of the universal terror which had been excited by the first appearance of the Gothic hordes, the

advocates of paganism had succeeded in persuading the multitude that their sufferings were a just judgment on them for their desertion of the immortal gods; the example of other cities was cited, where, on the approach of the barbarians, the people had restored the sacrifices and divinations practised by their fathers, and had, as they affirmed, been thereby saved from the fury of their enemies. A popular cry had been raised for the restoration of the gods; and on the Capitol itself, where two centuries before the Cross had been so solemnly planted by Constantine, the blood of victims flowed, and the abominable rites of heathen divination were openly practised amid blasphemies against the Name of Christ.

Rome, therefore, was not Christian; but neither was she pagan. Christian churches stood thick upon her seven hills; and far away from the spot where these impieties had been enacted, on the other side the Tiber, the basilica of the Apostles stood in all the glory of its first erection. Since the days of Babylonian greatness, never had mortal eye rested on so wonderful a sight as was then presented by the capital of the world. No devastating hand had as yet been laid upon her matchless beauty; palaces, columns, and temples, baths and theatres, rose upon her hills in countless profusion; and spots now beautiful only in their desolation, lying close to the living city, silent and deserted as the grave, with wild flowers hanging over their columns, and lizards hiding among their ruined walls, were then standing in all their proud magnificence, the wonders of the Roman world. The golden house of Nero still covered the vast space between the Viminal and the Palatine; the Circus and the Coliseum were the daily resorts of the people, whose passion for their favourite sports neither the threatened ruin of their city, nor even the famine which had followed on the Gothic invasion, was able to extinguish. The *suburban villas* had, indeed, been laid waste at the first *visit of Alaric* and his army; but many lay yet *untouched within* the walls,—like that whose ruins still

bear the name of Sallust, with gardens and fountains and every exquisite adornment of the arts, a marvellous display of all that luxury could devise or wealth produce.

Yet to Christian eyes Rome was a sad and melancholy place, and many a heart was filled with dark forebodings of her coming doom. Solemn sounds of warning were borne from the distant cells of Bethlehem, where St. Jerome proclaimed the prophetic woes threatened in the Apocalypse against the great Babylon, and invited all who would not partake in the plagues that should afflict her, to come out of her, and not to be partakers in her crimes. "Leave," he cries, "the proud city to exult in her everlasting uproar and dissipation, satiating her bloodthirstiness in the arena and her insane passion for the circus games. How different are the scenes that invite you hither! where sacred hymns and psalmody are the only interruptions to the heavenly stillness and serenity that reign around." Nor were his warnings disregarded; for whilst the pagan population abandoned themselves to the frenzied enjoyment of their criminal amusements with a recklessness that seemed to defy the dangers that surrounded them, vast numbers of the Roman Christians took refuge from the coming catastrophe in the Syrian and Egyptian deserts.

It was in the spring of 409 that Alaric appeared for the third time under the walls of Rome. The presence of his bands scarcely seemed to inspire the Romans with terror; they were filled with a strange confidence, which had its origin neither in their valour nor in their faith; and blindly trusting in the security of their lofty walls, they scornfully rejected the very thought that Rome should ever really fall before the hand of a barbarian conqueror. The Pope, Innocent I., was then absent at the court of Ravenna, whither he had accompanied the embassy which had been sent to solicit succour from the Emperor Honorius; but though, as we have said, vast numbers of Christians had fled from the city, [illegible]

they judged marked by a curse, many still remained; whilst to the clergy and religious the thought of abandoning their flocks and the sacred shrines of the Apostles to barbarian fury never once occurred.

It is to the heights of the Cœlian hill that we must now conduct the reader—to a spot not far from the Lateran Basilica, halfway down the road which still leads from the mother-church of Rome and of the world to the scene of Rome's unnumbered martyrdoms, the Flavian Amphitheatre or Coliseum.

To such of our readers as have once been familiar with the locality, it needs but few words to recall it. They will remember, times out of mind, when standing on the brow of the hill whose summit is crowned by the "Golden Basilica," as the Lateran was often called, they have looked down that long road which slopes towards the west, at the hour when the whole perspective that met their eye was bathed in a flood of sunset splendour. Then they have seen the vast fabric of the Coliseum floating in a golden mist, as though the blood which once watered its consecrated soil were rising to heaven in clouds of living glory; and whilst the light has been reflected back from the walls and windows of the Christian Basilica, they may have felt the contrast between the two buildings as they now stand to be a fit emblem of the triumph of Christian over Pagan Rome.

But at the time of which we speak this contrast did not exist. True, the Golden Basilica rose in even greater splendour than we now behold it; but the Forum, instead of presenting the eye with a scene of deserted ruin and decay, was thronged and busy. All the full tide of Roman life was swarming about its roads and buildings; and out of the arches of the Coliseum, now choked with crumbling ruins and a tangled mass of flowers and creeping plants, there rose the shouts and cries of the vast crowds within, who were in the enjoyment of their favourite amusements of the circus, as little concerned with the thought of danger

as though the hosts of the barbarians had never crossed the Alps. It is not to the amphitheatre, however, that we are about to conduct our reader, but to a house situated, as we have said, on the Cœlian hill, and withdrawn from the public thoroughfare; whose aspect was only remarkable for a look of poverty and neglect which distinguished it from the gay luxurious abodes that lay scattered at no great distance around it. Within one of the chambers of this house two persons were engaged in earnest deliberation; and from the sad and thoughtful expression which was visible on both their faces, it would seem that the subject of their discourse had been of solemn and anxious import. The dress of one marked him as an ecclesiastic; his age and appearance were alike venerable; yet was his age the least title to respect which might be claimed by Zozimus, the deacon of the Basilica of St. Peter. Reverenced alike by all classes, the care and government of the entire Church of Rome rested on his shoulders during the absence of the chief pastor: he in no degree shared the security and indifference of the populace; and the certainty of an approaching catastrophe, with the necessary precautions for protecting the sacred trust committed to his charge, wholly engaged his thoughts. His companion on the present occasion was a woman, whose dress was not less distinctive of the class to which she belonged than was the expression of her countenance. It was that of one who had grown old in the Divine service; who, like Anna, had served God in fasting and prayer, and in that ministry of mercy which was the special prerogative of the virgins and holy women of the early Christian Church.

"Thou art, then, prepared to accept thy charge, Orontia," said the old man; "nevertheless, if thou fearest for thyself or for any of thy companions, thou hast but to speak and St. Peter will doubtless find another treasurer, though, as I think, there is no house better fitted than thine own."

"Nay, father," replied Orontia, "it were scarcely

fair to deprive us of so dear a privilege. There is not one among us who would close our doors to your request, or refuse to give hospitality to the Lord's Apostle for any woman's fear. Rather might we rejoice to shed our blood, if need be, in the defence of his sacred treasury. Thinkest thou that such a death were martyrdom in the eyes of holy Church?"

"Doubtless were it," answered Zozimus; "forasmuch as thou wouldst die, not for the jewels and material gold, which are of little worth in the eyes of one espoused to poverty, like thyself, but for the dignity these vessels possess, in that they are consecrated for the Divine mysteries, and are the property of the blessed Peter, and that among them are relics of priceless value, which it were an act of Christian faith to preserve from sacrilege. However, I trust the risk is not so great: it is rather in the houses of the clergy that the barbarians will seek for the Church's treasures; the poverty of thy dwelling will be unsuspected, and thou and all thy company will be secure from their savage violence."

"And is the danger, then, so near?" asked Orontia. "There is no sign in the city that men are warned of its approach, and all day long the shouts from the circus have rung as wild and uproarious as though Rome were celebrating one of her old imperial triumphs, instead of standing, as thou sayest, on the brink of her doom."

"Orontia," replied the old man, "it is a saying with the Pagans, that those whom God would destroy He first deprives of judgment. These men have despised warnings and calls to repentance; they do not believe because they will not, and because they are blinded, not by ignorance, but by their mad ungoverned passions. Look up to that deep and beautiful sky," and as he spoke he pointed to the heavens, which, rich *in all the* hues of evening, were to be seen stretching *over the sunny* heights of the Alban Mount: "we deem *it a fair sight*, and to Christian hope it seems an emblem

of our rest; so clear and stainless in its purity, that, could we pierce its azure with the wings of the seraphim, we should find naught but distance to keep us back from God. Yet, had we eyes to see it, there hangs over our heads a thick cloud of man's iniquity, which would darken the very noonday sun, and which rises from the city day and night, and calls for vengeance and for woe. Nor will the woe be long in coming."

"Yet there has been no attack upon the walls, nor a single blow struck as yet," said Orontia; "whence, then, dost thou gather thy certainty of a speedy judgment?"

"Because," answered Zozimus, with a smile, "I have not deemed it unbecoming mine office as deacon of the Basilica of the Apostles to be watchman on the city-walls; and few days have passed, since the return of these barbarians, that I have not made my rounds as regularly as though I were captain of the imperial guard. Two days ago the tents of Alaric and his followers lay scattered without order, and, as it seemed, without design or plan, over the whole plain of the Campagna; but this morning there was a busy movement in the camp, and hour by hour you might have seen vast bodies marching from different quarters and congregating near the Salarian gate, a spot which is the worst guarded and the weakest in defence. It is there I look for the attack, nor do I think it can be long delayed. Alaric is famed for rapid and sudden blows."

Something like a shudder passed over the frame of his hearer. "Dost thou fear, Orontia?" he added, in a gentle voice; "thou hast ever looked for this."

"No, father," she replied, "I fear nothing; I did but think, ere another sun had set, how many a soul there may be judged and doomed of those who have scoffed at the warnings of the saints. If now indeed the time is at hand when the words of the beloved Apostle are to be *fulfilled*, what may we not look for in the hour

when God shall give the great Babylon to drink of the cup of His indignation!"

"Orontia," said the deacon after a pause, "it is written, that when the great day of final judgment has come and gone, and the earth has shrivelled like a scroll before the destroying fire, there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth justice. Even so do the saints deem of this city, which in its pride hath called itself the Eternal: when the judgment hath fallen, and the queen of empires is made desolate and miserable, the blood of the saints and martyrs which has watered its soil will have its own harvest, and God will have His new creation; and this city of Rome, the patrimony of Peter, shall be as holy and glorious in men's eyes as now she is sinful and accursed. Therefore take comfort when thou seest the wrath of God poured out in plagues upon the mystic Babylon; for these things must needs be, before Rome can put on her beautiful garments and shine forth as the new Jerusalem."

The words of Zozimus rang in the ears of the Christian virgin long after he himself had departed; and a solemn expectation of some near and awful catastrophe communicated itself to her soul. It was a peculiar characteristic in the minds of the Christians in the earlier ages of the Church to be ever looking for the day of doom; and Orontia was familiar with the prophecies and woes denounced against the capital of Paganism, and constantly interpreted by the Christians as close at hand. As, therefore, hour after hour passed by, and the shades of evening deepened into night, and the streets of the city were noisy with the sounds of mirth and revelry, in the lonely house upon the Cœlian hill that night was kept in solemn prayer and vigil. Within its walls, little in harmony with the clamour of the world around it, there rose to heaven the cry of intercession; and the feeble voices of a few Christian women might have been heard pleading to God for mercy for Rome and for the world.

Nor were they idle in the charge assigned them. As soon as the darkness rendered his messengers unobserved, Zozimus despatched to the house of Orontia the rich vessels belonging to the Basilica of St. Peter. These were concealed in the remotest chambers, and the community resolved to keep guard over their trust during the remaining hours of the night. They passed swiftly, in watch and prayer: little by little the sounds of merriment without died away; the stragglers in the streets dropped off one by one, and the city was sunk in the most profound repose. Rome soon lay steeped in slumber; and over her palaces and gardens, on this the last hour of their matchless beauty, the summer moon shed a soft and tranquil light; whilst the only sound that met the ear was the night-breeze, as it stirred among the orange-boughs, and shook from their starry blossoms an atmosphere of exquisite perfume.

What echoes are those which ring suddenly through the stillness of the night? Not the watchword of the sentinel, or the song of some late reveller, as he makes his way homeward after a deep carouse. It is a harsh and barbarous music, unlike any strain that might be looked for in the soft effeminate capital. Yet there are some who know the sound too well, and who start from their sleep, with an agony which thrills through every nerve, as they recognise the long shrill blast of the Gothic trumpets. The senators are roused, the whole city is awake and in motion—alas, too late for flight or for resistance! The enemy is in the heart of the city; the Salarian gate, but carelessly watched and thrown open by a traitor's hand, has offered an easy entrance to the barbarian hosts; and already their path may be traced by the flames which light them on their way, and which are to be the funeral pyres of imperial Rome. "They were guided by the burning palaces and temples," says a modern writer, whose account is taken from the historian Orosius, "from the villa of Sallust—a perfect sanctuary and garden of Epicurus—on to the Suburra, the Forum, the Capitol, and

above all, to the Golden House of Nero. They were led on by forty thousand fugitive slaves, who laboured during that night of horrors to wash out in patrician blood the hateful vestige of their chains. The things, not to be uttered, which Rome had so often perpetrated during the massacres and sieges of a thousand years, were now retaliated on herself. Her nobles were subjected to the most cruel tortures, to wring from them their hidden treasures; whilst the common people were mowed down in such multitudes, that the survivors did not suffice to bury the slain. The Forum, the Circus, and the Coliseum, the Capitol, the streets, and every public place, ran with blood. The palace-halls and chambers were the scenes of unutterable outrages; the seven-hilled city was in flames; its trophies and monuments, in which the lords of the earth had most prided themselves, were the chief objects of Gothic rage; and it was said, by eye-witnesses of these horrors, that those edifices whose solidity defied the brands of the barbarians were struck with thunderbolts from heaven."*

Yet, in the midst of these dreadful scenes, the leader of the Goths, whilst he encouraged his followers in their wildest excesses of fury, proclaimed one exception to the law of universal destruction. The Basilicas of the Apostles were to remain inviolate; for, like all the barbarian conquerors of Rome, Alaric was filled with an indefinable and mysterious awe of the Christian name. Even whilst he had declared, on his march upon the city, that he was moved not by choice but by a secret and invisible force, which urged him on to do justice upon the devoted spot, he had with the same voice declared that he warred not against St. Peter; and so entirely—we may almost add so supernaturally—had this feeling been infused among the bands of the Gothic invaders, that now, maddened with blood *and* the thirst for gold, and the thousand passions *which, on the* sack of a city, generally convert the most

* *Rome under Paganism and the Popes*, vol. ii. ch. vi.

disciplined army into a mob of savages, these men not only respected the thresholds of the sacred edifices, but had even led some of the Christians to take sanctuary within them, that, under the protection of the Apostles, they might be safe from the slaughter which raged around. As soon as the thirst for blood had been a little satiated, the Goths began their work of plunder. We can form no idea of the accumulated riches which fell into their hands. The exquisite works of art which adorned those princely palaces were broken up for the sake of their materials; vases, whose gold and jewels rendered them of far less price than the skill of their chasing and design, were perhaps shivered by the stroke of a battle-axe; and when the houses had been stripped of their more portable treasures, and the work of pillage began to yield less fruit to the rapacious soldiery, they proceeded to torture their prisoners in every imaginable way, to force them to reveal their hidden and undiscovered stores of wealth.

The transfer of the Church vessels to the house of Orontia had not been effected so secretly but that the circumstance had reached the knowledge of some of the citizens; and now, to escape the brutality of their conquerors, and, it may be, to win their favour by the disclosure, these soon offered to lead a company of their conquerors to a spot where their quest of plunder should be satisfied to the full.

The blows that fell on Orontia's door soon betokened to the inmates of the house that they could no longer hope to escape from the general catastrophe. Well knowing the impossibility of resistance, the Christian virgin calmly awaited the approach of the enemy in the midst of her little band of companions; and in a few moments the room, which had that night been the scene of long hours of prayer, was filled with the Gothic plunderers. Their aspect might well have appalled stronger hearts than those in whose presence they now stood. Huge of frame, with their arms and legs bare and dripping with blood, their faces lit up with the

wild intoxication of conquest and the most cruel passion that can possess the human heart, they loudly bad their victims bring forth the gold and silver which wa in their possession, or prepare for instant death.

Orontia gazed for a moment at the uplifted battle axes and the flashing eyes of the men before her: for moment she hesitated, for the words of Zozimus re curred to her, and the palm of martyrdom seemed jus within her grasp. But to what purpose were he death? Her charge was to defend, and, with God' help, to save, the treasures of the Church; and deat just then would but have placed them in the hands o the enemy, for an hour's search would have betraye their hiding-place. Her resolve was quickly taken without the slightest trace of emotion she replied to on who seemed to act as leader: "You have heard arigh that the treasures in my keeping are immense; I wil even now display them to your eyes; and, among al the wealth of Rome that you have this night gaze upon, I doubt if aught has met your view like tha which lies under this humble roof." So saying, sh opened the secret door which concealed a closet in th room where they were standing, and, throwing it wid upon its hinges, displayed to the astonished eyes of th Goth a glittering mass of gold and jewels such as hi wildest imagination had not pictured. There were th gifts of Constantine and St. Helen, the massive cros of purest gold, a hundred and fifty pounds in weight which usually decorated the sacred shrine of th Apostles. There were golden chalices studded witl emeralds, and chased relievos of silver matchless i workmanship and design; lamps and lustres of every variety, and all of precious metal, with censers, wher the gold of which they were composed was literally hidden by the diamonds with which they were every where covered.

Orontia watched the countenance of the barbarian *chief, as* he gazed, in savage astonishment, at the unex *pected sight; then,* with the same composure as before

she continued: "You see before you the sacred vessels used in the Divine mysteries at the altar of St. Peter the Apostle. If you be so minded, take them and begone; but the sacrilege be on your own head; for me, too feeble to defend them, I shall make no resistance."

"How!" exclaimed the barbarian, with a disappointed tone, "the vessels of St. Peter's altar! My master wars not with St. Peter; it were more than my head were worth did Alaric know I had laid hands on the treasury of the Basilica. And yet, by Odin! the emperor's palace can show no such vases as those jewelled vessels yonder: Alaric must see them, and decide the point with St. Peter himself. Here, Ataulph," he continued, turning to one of his followers, "seek the chief without loss of time: he is not far distant; tell him that fortune has discovered to us a treasury that surpasses the riches of the Golden House itself, but that it calls St. Peter lord, and that I crave to know if it be not his pleasure to let it change its owner, seeing that the blessed Apostle hath but little need now of what they tell us he ever scorned in life."

Ataulph left the house, and his comrades remained awaiting in silence the result of his embassy. The silence was not broken by the Christian prisoners: Orontia, who hardly dared hope that her bold expedient had met with success, was absorbed in painful anxiety for the fate of her charge and of her companions; and whilst they stood motionless and with eyes closed, to shut out the frightful presence of their captors, their hearts were raised to God in fervent but wordless prayer. The brief moments seemed hours; but Ataulph at length returned. "The vessels of St. Peter are to be conveyed instantly and without fail to St. Peter's Basilica," he exclaimed; "and Alaric denounces his severest chastisements on the head of him who shall presume to lay a plundering hand were it on the most worthless vase among their number. Moreover, he *would have the women* in whose possession they have

been found guarded and protected to the sanctuary of the Apostle, together with all Christians who may choose to join their company."

"Alaric hath his own views in this matter," said the chief, "and his own way of enforcing them: for us, men, if we do not wish to be hung up by our feet over one of the blazing houses, we had best execute them promptly;" and at his orders each man proceeded to load himself with some portion of the treasures which lay before them. They did so with a certain emotion of reverence and superstitious fear. The extraordinary courage and tranquillity of the Christian virgins had inspired them with a respect they could not account for; whilst the name of St. Peter, which had so mysterious a power over their ferocious leader, seemed to fill them with a strange and irresistible awe. The preparations were soon ready for their departure, and, to their silent wonder, Orontia and her companions found themselves placed in the midst of a procession of the wild and savage soldiery, bearing on their heads the sacred vessels, while they directed their course towards the Basilica of St. Peter.

"The convent," says the historian Orosius, "was on the Cœlian hill, so that the entire city had to be traversed—an immense distance—in order to reach St. Peter's. It was then that an astounding spectacle presented itself to the eyes of all. Through the greatest thoroughfares of the city, and amidst all the horrors of that night, a solemn train is seen advancing, with the same order and measured step as if it moved not through scenes of slaughter, violence, and conflagration, but through hallowed aisles, on some joyous festival. A martial retinue of the Goths marched, as a guard of honour, to adorn the triumph with their glittering arms, and to defend their devout companions, who bore the sacred vessels of massive gold and silver *aloft upon their* heads. The voices of the barbarians *are united with* those of the Romans to swell the hymns *of Christian* praise; and these sounds are heard, like the

trumpet of salvation, re-echoing far and wide amidst the destruction of the city. The Christians start in their hiding-places as they recognise the celestial canticles, and crowd from every direction to follow the vessels of St. Peter. Even multitudes of Pagans, joining loudly in the hymns of Christ, take part in the procession; thus escaping under the shadow of the sacred name, that they may live to assail it with greater violence than ever. Joined by fugitives from every side, the pageant seems interminable; and in proportion as it is lengthened by new accessions, the barbarians contend with each other for the privilege of marching as guards on either side, armed with their battle-axes and naked swords."

A more extraordinary or a more wonderful spectacle can hardly be imagined than this midnight procession, or, as it is fitly termed by the Spanish historian, this "triumph" of Christianity in the very hour of the downfall of Pagan Rome. No miracle can be considered more marvellous and evident than the working of that supernatural influence over men inflamed with the worst passions, changing their savage fury, for the moment, into a kind of religious enthusiasm, so that, as the writer before quoted observes, "they left the pursuit of plunder, and wielded their reeking weapons to protect the lives and treasures of their vanquished enemies." They passed on through the smoking ruins of palaces and luxurious villas; they passed through the Forum, lighted by its blazing temples, and the crowd gave way before them, and gazed at them as though on some supernatural spectacle. Then, threading their way through darker thoroughfares, they left the Campus Martius on their right, and stood at length with the broad waves of the Tiber at their feet; while beyond them, on the further bank, rose dark against the moonlit sky the stately Basilica of the Apostles. Glorious as it stands even in our own day, it may be doubted whether the magnificence of the modern church rivals that of the erection of *Constantine* in the prime of its gorgeous beauty.

As the great procession reached the outer court, which then, as now, lay in front of the Basilica, the eyes of the Gothic chieftain were arrested by the scene of solemn and surpassing beauty which lay before them. In the midst of that open space rose a fountain of strange and mysterious design, adorned with symbols of Christian significance, all executed in the richest materials. There was the cross, and the Agnus Dei, and the palm, all wrought in bronze, or mosaic, or the richest marble. The enormous basin was surrounded by a colonnade of porphyry; and in the midst a fairy pine, of gilded bronze, spread its glittering branches far over the waters, that rose and danced in the moonlight, and cast their feathery spray and sweet melancholy murmur far over the quiet space around. As they drew nearer the great gates of the Basilica, their torches flashed on the gilded tiles and mosaics that decorated its front. At the summit of the vast flight of steps which led to the vestibule they were met by Zozimus, surrounded by the other priests of the Basilica; and we may well imagine what the emotions must have been that filled his breast and that of Orontia, as they met again at that wonderful moment of deliverance.

The barbarians laid their burdens on the ground, and knelt reverently on the sacred threshold. "Father," said the Gothic chief, "we have fulfilled the behest of Alaric, and have brought the servants and the vessels of St. Peter hither in safety. Wherefore we pray you to send us away in peace; for my master would face the legions of the imperial host rather than brave the curse of Him you serve."

"I curse no man," said the venerable deacon; "and for the deed you have done this night I pray that God and St. Peter may give you grace. Depart, therefore, in peace, as you came, and bethink you if the things you have seen this night be not fairer than the blood-*shed and rapine* which you have left: it may be the *day will come* when the echo of those Christian hymns *will re-awaken* in your ears; and then remember that

St. Peter's gates are ever open, and that he is no niggard in his thanks."

The Goths withdrew with the same order as they had observed in their march, and the priests, taking up the sacred vessels, and followed by the whole body of Christian fugitives, entered the church, and gave solemn thanks for their deliverance at the altar of the Apostles.

When day dawned over the Eternal City, where, but a few hours before, might have been seen the glory of the civilised world, there lay nothing but a heap of smoking ruins. A few edifices alone had escaped the general destruction: they were the Christian churches; and as the two great basilicas raised their gorgeous walls unscathed in the midst of the blackened and devastated city, they seemed to claim for the Church that rule and sceptre which had passed from Pagan Rome for ever. Not, indeed, that the great Babylon, whose empire had extended over a thousand years, was to be destroyed by a single blow: by turns she was to be crushed under the feet of the Huns, the Vandals, and the Ostrogoths, before the last breath of life could be trampled out of her; nor was it till all these successive tempests had swept over her seven hills that the last remains of her idolatrous superstitions finally disappeared. This was not effected by any partial destruction, but by one so utter and entire that when, in the following century, Totila determined on the final demolition of the city, the words of his fatal decree proclaimed that "Rome should be turned into a pasturage for cattle."

And this was no empty threat: for as the Goths, after tearing down the city gates, turned their backs on the smoking and ruined heaps, that had once been Rome, not a single human being remained within the circuit of the walls, and "for forty days," says Procopius, "there were none but wild beasts within the city."

Still the first fatal blow was struck by the conquest of Alaric; and when the news ran through the world

that Rome had yielded to the barbarians, a universal feeling spread among the Christians of the empire, that the prophecies of the Apocalypse had begun to receive their accomplishment, and that the judgments of God on the empire of Paganism were about to prepare the way for the triumph of the Cross. Other ages were to see that hope more perfectly fulfilled: the very temples of Heathen worship were to bear the sign of the Christian faith; the day was to come when the statues of the Apostles, dominant and triumphant, were to crown the summits of Rome's proudest monuments; the kingdom of the world was to become the kingdom of Christ; and that obelisk, once the wonder of the heathen world, was to bear on its face the inscription which we may read in our own day:

Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat;
Christus ab omni malo
Plebem suam defendat.

(Christ conquereth, Christ reigneth, Christ ruleth;
May Christ from all evil
Defend his people.)



LONDON:
PRINTED BY ROBSON, LEVEY, AND FRANKLYN,
Great New Street and Fetter Lane.



